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You Sound Like A Broken Record:

A practice led interrogation of the ontological resonances of vinyl record culture.

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PhD – Creative and Critical Practice

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature.....

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This work is dedicated to my Dad, Dr. V. Nataraj.

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CONTENTS

Abstract	5
Introduction	6---22
Chapter One: Records, Art, Music	23 --- 36
Chapter Two: Authorial Murder, Palimpsests and Resurrection	37 --- 53
Chapter Three: Starting From Scratch	54 --- 76
Chapter Four: Crushed Grooves and Chopped Conversations	77 --- 97
Conclusion: You Sound Like A Broken Record	98--- 113
Bibliography	114 - 127
Discography	128--- 130

ABSTRACT:

This work offers a sustained critical reflection an original practice---based exploration of the vinyl record called *You Sound Like a Broken Record*. It takes up the following research questions: What can personal narratives associated with vinyl records provide in terms of rethinking this icon of the music industry?

It asks where the vinyl record may fit into the fluid and fragmentary narratives of musical listening? How does it interface with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of personal ownership, and can a creative intervention help to unpack this complexity? In doing so it interrogates the role of material props of aiding and managing personal identification through music. The research is located with the field of Sound Studies, and explores these questions in dialogue with the theoretical work of Adorno, Attali, (musical commodification), Barthes (authorship), Dillon (palimpsests), De Certeau, Levi-Strauss (resistance and bricolage), Kelly (cracked media), Deleuze (rhizomatic ontology) and Schloss (the art of sampling). The research is based upon ethnographic interviews with fourteen respondents who each donated one of their most treasured vinyl records. Their stories were next carved onto the surface of each record, creating a palimpsest, thereby producing fourteen unique sonic sculptural works. The final outcome is one vinyl record containing sound pieces that use the 'broken records' and the respondents' narratives as their sonic material. Through the use of this methodology and its resulting practice, the thesis discusses the fragmentary voices that make up the narratives of their musical memories. In doing so, the thesis demonstrates that the vinyl record is a multivalent, interwoven, productive and fluid object. It critically sheds light on the record as a flexible partner to musical identification. The thesis together with the 'recordworks' provides valuable insight into the record as a cultural 'hobo' that holds a dialectical position as a symbol of cultural subversion, as a product of the music industry, and as a repository for both music and deeply held personal memory and emotions. In doing so, the work also highlights in an original way, how the record provides an opportunity for everyday resistance to canonical narratives and linear formations of musical listening and making practices.

INTRODUCTION:

THE NEEDLE DROP

‘There is something viciously circular in the life of a record.’ (Eisenberg: 2005, 90)

‘You Sound Like Broken Record’ (YSLABR) is a practice based research project, located within the field of sound studies that explores the vinyl record through the personal narratives of its users. It takes up the following research questions: What can personal narratives associated with vinyl records provide in terms of re---thinking this icon of the music industry? It asks where does the vinyl record fit into the fluid and fragmentary narratives of our musical listening? How does it interface with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of personal ownership, and can a creative intervention unpack this complexity? In doing so it interrogates the role of material props of aiding and managing personal identification through music?

This project has been designed to contribute to the field of sounds studies and to fully engage with what Pinch and Bjisterveld define as: ‘an emerging interdisciplinary area that studies the material production and consumption of music, sound, noise, and silence, and how these have changed throughout history and within different societies, but does so from a much broader perspective than standard disciplines such as ethnomusicology, history of music, and sociology of music.’ (Pinch and Bjisterveld, 2004: 636). Sound studies scholarship explores the intersections of aurality and how our sound worlds can provide a new, uncharted and deep understanding of the world around us. Questions central to this multidisciplinary field are, how sounding technologies have impacted their users, and equally how their users have influenced the development of these technologies. Drawing from this line of questioning YSLABR’s key concern is the individual relationship between gramophonic technologies, focused on the vinyl record, and its users. Therefore it contributes to this field through its chosen focus of study. Further to this, Labelle states that ‘sound studies takes such ontological conditions of the sonic self and elaborates upon the particular

cultures, histories, and media that expose and mobilise its making.’ (Labelle, 2010, xx) In YSLABR the research has been designed to specifically engage with this mode of discovery. The work hopes to expose the sonic self through the personal narratives attached to the vinyl record, and through their subsequent retelling in the creative practice. Sound studies is a burgeoning area of study, with varied and exciting work being produced, as Boon writes, ‘[i]f sound studies is to thrive... it is going to be a broad church.’ (Boon, 2015, 498) My practice has embraced such breadth as I have attempted to pin down at least some of the ever---shifting locations that the vinyl record has found itself in. The record is a cultural hobo that holds a dialectical position as both a symbol of cultural subversion and a product of the music industry, remaining equally totemic in both paradigms. In being able to sustain such paradoxes across much of the history of recorded music, the record is illustrative of the on---going tensions inherent in music practices and analysis. To give new form to these contradictions I have physically re---inscribed this multifaceted object, using ethnographic interviews as conduit and catalyst for this process. I felt that altering the thing itself would be the best method of revealing the vinyl record in all its flat complexity and to unearth and instantiate its provocative paradoxes. Furthermore this practice---based approach has been designed in order to explore the personal narratives in original ways, to unpack new insights from the vinyl record’s complex ontology.

The initial staring point for this project was a conversation I had in 2010 while I was working in a college in North London. A student, Ali, had taken it upon himself to rearrange his Youtube playlists during one of my lessons. In an attempt to get him back on track I started to talk to Ali about his playlists, what they contained and how he used them, to track and catalogue the music he listened to. He had a variety of fascinating insights into the inexhaustible Youtube archive and its advantages over archaic listening platforms, like the ritualized playing of tapes, CDs and vinyl records. It was a world, which at that point was alien to me. During this chat I asked Ali, what he would do if Youtube shut down in the future? How would he envisage sharing all this music with his

kids, should the time come, as much of my own musical education took place in between the sleeves of various record collections. My question met with a blank stare. His wide eyes blinked once, and then he said, 'I dunno, never really thought about it.' He turned back to his computer and hastily got back to curating a 'Crunk' playlist.

The MP3 compression technology via which Ali and his peers access their music, is described as a 'lossy' format. This nomenclature relates to the way MP3 technology compresses the massive amount of data required to digitally duplicate music. The encoding algorithm essentially makes a judgment about the frequency ranges that are deemed necessary for us to hear when listening to the playback of song. Those frequencies that we can do without, that apparently will not impact on our enjoyment of the music are stripped away from the original file. This is a process that Sterne terms 'perceptual coding' (2013). He explains that, 'the MP3 encoder also does some things to the stereo image, based on assumptions about where people do and don't need to hear stereo, and it cuts off some of the very highest frequencies, assuming (correctly) that most adults don't hear well above 16kHz' (Sterne, 2014, online). Sterne's story of the MP3, is bound in the political economy of the tech industry through the 80s and 90s. The arms race to conquer digital has had significant effect on music, listening practices and attitudes since the late 90s, in much the same way that cylinder vs disc impacted listener's habits the century before. (Osborne, 2012). From a consumer's perspective, or even from a neoliberal standpoint, the MP3 algorithm is reductive on the individual level of the song, but reimburses us on the macro level of the collection. This separation of music from its previous material anchors led me to try to better understand what those anchors may actually be capable of securing. For Ali and his peers, who have not known analogue formats or modes of listening, what goes missing along with the record, tape or CD, other than just some imperceptible frequencies?

Ali's response begged a number of questions that have also informed this work. Firstly, in specific virtual spaces, does the separation of music from its material

anchors actually matter? How 'lossy', is 'lossy'? What else do we lose as we move into the world of the digital streaming and cloud listening? In this landscape with its speed and intransience, one wonders where one can learn about the sounds one hears, or indeed if it's necessary to do so. We don't need all the frequencies to get something from the listening experience; if we don't perceive it, it was never so, we flew past it unwittingly, just happy to be travelling. Music's referents have always been ephemeral, but perhaps recent changes in listening habits have further distanced what may have been considered real previously. There are no material props for Ali to use in his musical identification, yet by looking to the record itself one may be able to ascertain some of what is happening in the construction of musical narratives over the time of a person's ownership of a record, that may also allow us to rethink the transient musical engagement described above. The research design of YSLABR has been engineered specifically to foreground this analogue data set.

One could argue that my reasoning is reactionary, akin to that adopted by many, at the initial moments of emergent technologies. The new technology is feared, often seen as being reductive to the idea of what it means to be human. (Kittler (1986), McLuhan (1967), Benjamin (1936), Manovich (2002)). Yet over the period of a technological era, during its use or as it becomes redundant, the user and the technology itself are constantly in flux. It is here that we should be minded to consider '[t]he question of how people operate upon media thus has to be complemented by the equally important question of how media operate on people' (Kittler, 1986, xxii), as Kittler does. Our continually developing attitudes to the media we use bring us into a feedback loop with the products of our consumption, that, I would argue leave a trace on multiple parties who are often involved in such mediated transactions. The trace of the past therefore also has an important role to play in our present interconnectedness. Indeed the trace is the foundation, fragmentary maybe, but a foundation nonetheless, for the current state of play.

If we can say that objects are relational, that they require one another to function, whether in real or virtual spaces, then they produce each other in communion with us. We are knitted into a feedback loop of multifaceted significations alongside the things we use. Processes of reception and use not only shape our individual outlook, but also could influence that of those who we are in contact with us and add to the complex ontology of the vinyl record that this work is trying, at its least to highlight. Music has proven itself to be a productive conduit, a carrier, not only of sound, but also those innermost incommunicable moments, that express our humanity, both personally and collectively. In this work I wanted to bring these connections and traces to the fore, in order to rethink the ways in which the objects of that listening help shape our emotional connections to the music that we listen to. This work was also an attempt to shed light on how users of certain media have forged their musical paths and what these may look like; and as a corollary to explore how, or if, certain materialities, in particular vinyl records, and their specific affordances can produce unique ontological formations for their users. In 1986 Kittler warned that ‘data flows once confined to books and later to records and films are increasingly disappearing into black holes and boxes that, as artificial intelligences, are bidding us farewell on their way to nameless high commands. In this situation we are only left with reminiscences, that is to say stories.’ (Kittler, 1986, xxxix) It is this very notion with which YSLABR engages.

To follow from Kittler’s assertion and to find such stories I started by speaking to those listeners who were at some point engaged in the process of listening to music via the vinyl record. The reason for this choice was to better understand what these media mean at this present moment, as the status of the record has shifted once again, from a heavy decline to a healthy resurgence. This line of questioning has been used to try to find out what material props are required to help manage identification through music, and what the personal narratives associated with vinyl records can provide in terms of re---thinking this icon of the music industry? The changing role of the collector has been documented in scholarship, to try and track these developments as the musical listening

practices have changed so rapidly over time. This project is influenced by such research, for example Shuker's work on collecting provided a good platform from which to start to consider ideas of value that underpin the whole of this creative process. His theorization of collectors' 'pathologies such as completism, accumulation and a preoccupation with collection size' (Shuker, 2010: 312), and in addition notions of stewardship and cultural preservation has founded this work. Shuker's conception of the collector, and the hermeneutics of their habitual hoarding have been subverted through the practice, a process that will be further explained below.

Richard Osborne provides us with an exceptional and exhaustive history of the vinyl record. He deconstructs the constituent parts of the disc and explores each with a great technical expertise, allowing us to understand how and why the record has taken its present form. This background has been useful to me, especially in trying to better conceptualize the groove itself, as Osborne writes '[t]he groove is a text that dissolves the difference between the signifier and the signified.' (Osborne, 2012: 7) Understanding the groove to be the embodiment of recorded sound, was essential in developing the practical work to start to unpack the complexity of the vinyl record, and its fluid and fragmentary narratives. Although Osborne expresses some of the social instances of the vinyl record's use, these cases are read from an historical perspective and again are confined to professional paradigms of music production. He gives a predominance to form, and how form has had a hand in shaping the music that eventually was stamped into the surface of the plastic. Indeed Osborne makes the assertion that, [s]ongs created for and purchased as vinyl discs became songs thought of as vinyl discs. (Osborne, 2012: 72) the two things are symbiotic, and this also relates to ways in which listeners then approach and experience the song itself. One could ask if we fall in love with the just the song or the disc that carries the song to us, the material which allows us to keep the song. This line of thought takes up the question of what material props are required to help manage identification through music? Osborne also relates this to the music--- making, saying that 'the embodiment of music also became part of music making practice.' (Osborne,

2012: 72) Again this positions the thinking behind the practice elements of this work, in making the materiality of the vinyl record an essential aesthetic element in the final sonic pieces.

My work has engaged with ideas from the above works and a further collection of writings on phonography from the earliest days of the phonograph. Some of these contributions are lucidly traced, in Kittler's text 'Gramophone, Film, Typewriter'. Although not centered at the heart of the discussion included here, Kittler's overarching historical account has been invaluable in my own navigation of the subject, especially when thinking about the record as a data storage device, and evaluating the historical context of attitudes towards phonography. I would also suggest that Benjamin and his groundbreaking essay, 'Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' has played a significant role in the developmental stages of this work, but once again, with word and time constraints a fuller discussion of this theoretical framework will unfortunately have to wait for future papers. Suffice to say the echoes of his "aura," like a dub delay, ring off into the rhythm of this work, a trace I wanted to acknowledge.

The work of the Frankfurt School has had a significant role to play in forming the foundation of the YSLABR approach to re---inscribing the vinyl record both physically and theoretically. Theodor W. Adorno's ideas about the effect of the record on the systems of cultural commodification and by consequence the standardization of musical form, has been extremely influential my thinking throughout this project. A deeper discussion and critique of Adorno can be found in Chapter One, 'Records, Art, Music'. Adorno's sometimes overbearing strictures of the role of commodification in music are questioned here, and I have worked through these in conjunction with Jaques Attali's apprehension of the power that the control of noise plays in industrialized societies. I have attempted to bring a more contemporary angle to Adorno's thesis, by applying the critique of Richard Middleton, and also by placing Adorno in the presence of those historical figures, both musicians and artists who imagined great potentials for these ghostly recording and playback devices. The record is full of paradoxes and creative

potentials that Chapter One highlights. Adorno is used as a starting point from which to consider the role that the record plays in processes of engendering or constraining musical originality.

Theoretical approaches to the vinyl record have produced research in relation to connoisseurship, expertise, musical marketing strategies, generic subversion, or the more recent 'vinyl is back' zeitgeist. (Harvey, 2017, 586) All these approaches are valid and essential to understand the continuing multi-strand narrative of vinyl's ongoing story. But they all commonly look to the voices of experts to give insight into the way in which vinyl operates, or has previously operated. The focus of this project however, is in the way in which the object can inscribe personal memory, and to explore the ways in which the individual is able to consolidate or perhaps even gain agency during this process. In other words, as one of my main research question states, what can personal narratives associated with vinyl records provide in terms of re-thinking this icon of the music industry? To find these stories, with which to answer this question I engaged with an oral history methodology. The Popular Memory Group write that '[t]here is a common sense of the past which though it may lack consistency and explanatory force, none the less contains elements of good sense. Such knowledge may circulate, usually without amplification, in everyday talk and in personal comparisons and narratives. It may even be recorded in certain intimate cultural forms: letters, diaries, photograph albums and collections of things with past associations.' (Popular Memory Group, 2006, 45). It is exactly this unamplified knowledge that YSLABR wanted to plug into. To veer away from the canonical master narrative of the vinyl story, and to see how these records affected the everyday consumer. Those who had an interest in the records they had collected for predominantly personal reasons, but were not necessarily overwhelmed by being collectors. I was interested in those whose few records languished in a bedding box at the bottom of the bed, and no matter if they were ever played, they were never getting thrown out. It was these stories and the correspondent records that I wanted to find. I hoped that in these stories and locked into these grooves I might hear some trace of the interweaving voices that make up the

resonant qualities of the vinyl record inscribed through its individual use. Then subsequently I would experiment with these objects and their stories, to investigate how one can tease these layers apart to better expose the multifarious strata of significations that make up this complex and vibrant object, in an attempt to answer the question of how the vinyl record interfaces with other strands of narrative formation over the time of ownership? I felt that the best way to approach this and previous questions would be to speak to individuals about a record that they felt held a special place in their heart. I wanted to find the story of that one record that would be saved from the wreckage, or that might have saved its owner from the wreckage, perhaps? I believed that this approach would engender the primary data and materials required to express a new and original understanding of the object, and to instantiate this through the creation of the YSLABR 'recordworks' and sonic pieces.

The complication of selecting people was that the respondents would have to provide me with interview material, and they would also have to be willing to part with a precious record. Methodologically speaking the practice was going to be an exploration of the materials that I collected. However, I intended to carve a transcription of the respondents' story back onto the surface of the record to create a unique object, a vinyl palimpsest. This creative practice is in itself an artwork that embodies the tensions and paradoxes inherent in the concept of the records and importantly in the narratives that are being shared with me. In this process the record would be forever changed, from one perspective destroyed, from another re---enlivened. This would mirror a process that I suspect is already taking place between us and our collections of music, however through the creative practice I would expose this connection to eye and ear, and hopefully show where vinyl records fit into the fluid and fragmentary narrative that shape the identity of music listening. Therefore to hand over a prized record that you have been holding onto for years, to be vandalized, was evidently a weighty request, and reduced the number of potential respondents. The vinyl record is used in many different ways and through different temporalities during its life, hence the main research question of how it interfaces with different strands of

narrative formation over the time of ownership. The inscriptive intervention hopes to show some of these and the ways in which value is attributed to an object at different times and what internal or external communicative structures, be they familial, societal, or cultural can define this value as it peaks and wanes. As Bartmanski and Woodward point out, 'physical records record more than just sounds. As their obdurate condition allows them to last and outlast their owners, they can record history, personal and collective.' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, 176). I wanted to try and get to the collective through the histories of very personal.

A key consideration in the selection of respondents was that people volunteered freely and were found as randomly as possible. I wanted to ensure that they weren't into the same musical 'stuff' as each other, as other academic work has rather focused on genre and the way that this has influenced the use of vinyl. I also wanted to ensure that there was no focus on a particular group of respondents due to, age, ethnicity, gender, geographical location, psychographic or demographic profiling. However accessing from a large age range proved problematic as, quite obviously, people who have used and still use vinyl records to listen to music are specifically historically located, and round about the same age, over thirty years old. As I was primarily interested in the respondent's individual relationship with the record, if during the interviews a discussion was to ensue that covered aspects of genre, in relation to the record then I was not opposed to this; however I wanted to negate this being part of the initial consideration, as I felt that this might have clouded the discussion of the personal narrative itself. In order to meet these criteria for selection I placed a number of physical print adverts in a variety of places including a local paper, a local Oxfam shop that specialized in music and had a large selection of vinyl and another local record shop. I also had a friend who was studying for a PhD in psychotherapy who put an advert on the notice board in her institution. In addition I posted on a number of online forums asking for participants, these websites included the record---cataloging site Discogs.com and I also placed a status update on my personal Facebook account that was shared amongst friends

and family. All of these avenues garnered respondents, as did word of mouth, where one respondent had told another what they were doing and consequently someone else wanted to get involved.

I gathered records and interviews from fourteen respondents, which I conducted between 2013 and 2015. The group consisted of exactly seven men and seven women, who were from different locations around the UK. There was one respondent who was residing in Germany and another who was German but was residing in the UK. All the other respondents were residents of the UK. My youngest respondent was aged 33 at the time of the interview and my eldest being in their late 50s. Respondents' ages ranged between these two parameters, a fact that is commensurate with the idea of a 'golden age' of vinyl consumption, even through its decline in the 90's. Each research interview lasted between one and one and a half hours and was conducted in a number of different locations depending on the preference of the interviewee. Most were recorded in person, and four were conducted over the phone or via Skype. All were recorded via a Tascam PCM hard disc recorder and I then transcribed each one, with all transcripts being checked by the respondent, to ensure the accuracy of each account, before I continued with the practice. Due to the nature of the practice, inscribing these stories onto the records in an indelible, and physically long lasting way, this final part of the process was even more important than in normal circumstances, I would suggest. The interview questions were prepared and sent to each respondent before hand, and were consistent for each interview. The questions had been designed to ensure that there was a focus on both the record and the personal narrative. This allowed me to easily focus on these sections of the interviews during the practice elements of the work. Equally each interview was designed specifically to adhere to the main research questions namely: what can personal narratives associated with vinyl records provide in terms of re---thinking this icon of the music industry? Where does the vinyl record fit into the fluid and fragmentary narratives of our musical listening? How does the vinyl record interface with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of personal ownership? What is the role of material props of aiding and

managing personal identification through music? By asking each respondent to detail the specific story attached to their record, and then to expand on the background to this story and to trace their wider attitudes to their collections, listening, and for some music making over time, I hoped to gather enough data to answer the above research questions with quality and insight. I was also using these stories as the source material for the musical compositions and so the deeper the research interview could be the more scope I had to really explore the creative potentials therein.

The stories I gathered were so diverse, engaging and overflowing with excellent material, that I felt it pertinent to cover just a few examples with some depth, rather than to write about all fourteen without sufficient detail in this thesis. I have developed a deeper analysis of a selection of the stories and selected works. For example in Chapter Two I have focused on just one of my respondents Sheena and her record 'Station to Station' by David Bowie. The chapter discusses the way in which the metaphor of the palimpsest can help to unpick and reimagine our relationships with musical texts, but also with the many other contributing, interlayering and overlapping actors that make up the multi-stranded braid of the record. This chapter attempts to answer both how the vinyl record interfaces with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of ownership and also where does the vinyl record fit into the fluid and fragmentary narratives of musical listening? As Dillon states, often times there can be a 'lack of clarity in unearthing the ontology of someone's relationship to the object -- so instead the palimpsest provides us with a sense of 'merging'" (Dillon, 2007, 4) I argue that this 'sense of merging', deepens our understanding of the social, political, historical, and poetic context of the object.

In Chapter Three, 'Starting From Scratch', I concentrate my analysis on the stories of Andreas, Elizabeth and Howard, by working on the notion that records represent a space of subversion to appear in everyday listening and life. Records can be a portal to new spaces, sets of values, tastes and cultural formations through which we can reimagine our world. I mirror this opening up of the

record into a fragmentary, layered object through the practice---based methodology, of inscription and then composition. In fact, I am at pains to augment and shine a light on this lacuna through the inscriptions on the records. My respondents and their stories have, in essence, given me the tools to fracture the record and show it in its fragmentary reality. I am working in conjunction with my respondent because, without the record there is no story, without the story there is no practice, because there is nothing to inscribe. In this way we all become part of the story, a layer, a sub strata in the palimpsest of the narrative. So in Chapter Three I interpret my respondent's stories via this double lens, of the respondents own experience and my own role as participant observer developed through a reciprocal encounter. I use the work of Claude Levi Strauss and his notion of the 'bricoleur' to locate this practice work. In addition De Certeau's work on subversion through everyday tactics, that I believe provides an obvious lineage to Levi Strauss work, is also part of the theoretical framework that underpins this chapter.

Furthermore I bring together the idea of the scratch, in this case the form of my manipulation of the object, and make the connection between this real life breakage, and the metaphorical breakage that all of my respondents have experienced through their disparate uses and memories of the record. Both Levi Strauss and De Certeau believe in the power of the individual to reshape their own surroundings and importantly how vital this is in maintaining and functioning as a diverse and progressive population. My engagement with Levi Strauss and De Certeau is underpinned by trying to reach a better understanding of how the personal narratives associated with the vinyl record can provide us with new and original ways of thinking about this icon of the music industry.

In the paradigm of art practice, and as a bridge between the palimpsestuous inscription and the compositional elements of the practice, Caleb Kelly's book 'Cracked Media' provided an excellent platform from which to think about YSLABR's vinyl vandalism. Kelly discusses the work of a group of contemporary artists whose practice pushes sounding media to the absolute limits of use. For

Kelly, a 'cracked media' artist is 'the experimentalist who is prepared to extend his or her instrument to the point at which it breaks, perhaps never to be used again in the manner in which it was intended.' They embrace, '[t]his risk of sometimes great loss', and turn it 'into great gain as traditional and commonplace sound practices are themselves transformed, extended and expanded.' (Kelly, 2009: 6) Describing the work of Christian Marclay the most famous, but I would argue not the most forward thinking of the vinyl record artists, Kelly makes the point that the scratches that are placed on the object mean that, '[t]he record is still playable; it still does the job it was intended to do, although without the possibility of transparency.' (Kelly, 2009: 35) My work is based on this premise, to explore the ways in which the record might reveal the secrets of ownership trapped inside its grooves. To bypass the sounds that already exist there, or at least to bring the object and its story into relief, forming a new sonic companionship, the scratch along with the present sounding material. In Chapter Three I discuss this 'cracking' and its combination with De Certeau and Levi Strauss in being able to re---enliven the sounding object into a new form. As Kelly writes, '[f]or new meaning to be created a crisis or catastrophe must occur, or perhaps an accident, that will focus the elements of chaos into a singular focused emergent menacing. Noise is then filled with all future possibilities.' (Kelly, 2009: 81) In the case of YSLABR, my respondents have stored up this noise, it has been waiting in the wings, in readiness for its starring role.

These aesthetic concerns about how the records then sound after they have been inscribed, brings us on to the final chapter of the thesis, 'Crushed Grooves and Chopped Conversations'. Here I outline some of the techniques and processes I have engaged with to make the sonic pieces after sampling the playbacks of the 'broken' records. The compositional decisions being made are fundamentally linked to the stories of each of my participants. In each case I have taken the emotional essence of the story they have told me and tried to represent this through the sounds that have been used and the way the track has been constructed. In all cases the workable sounds have been prescribed by the way that the prepared records sound, with the only additional audio being recordings

from the interviews themselves. I discuss the compositional decisions for four of the fourteen tracks, those of Jonathan, Tony, Adam and Derek the tracks being 'Tru Thoughts', 'Badgewearer', 'Klaus Wunderlich', and 'Dodgy'. I choose these four because I felt that the approach to these four tracks exemplified my aesthetic choices, and made the connection to my own musical experiences in hip-hop, a genre that is also indelibly linked to the vinyl record. This is a link I felt important to discuss, as I have created works that are built up out of a number of temporally dislocated layers, culminating in the final aesthetic decisions. Hip-hop's connection to the vinyl record is well documented and the record, record collecting and sampling practices remain foundational pillars of the culture, with turntablism being a direct musical expression being produced from old records, extending their life cycles, and imagining them as highly productive sounding objects. I would consider these dexterous manipulations to be a form of 'cracking', for hip-hop DJs also mark and deface their records, just maybe not to the same extent as those working in the field of noise music. For Marclay, Knizak and even more recent vinyl artists such as Brinkmann, Wiggan, Kashiwagi, Jeck, Yagi and Anderson, work with the vinyl record is about sound creation beyond the rhythmic, beyond the sounds on the record itself, records are simply material. In YSLABR there is an attempt to use in the record within both these paradigms. To develop an aesthetic that is more reflective of our current musical position that has accepted the art of noises onto the mainstream sonic palette. Therefore some generic conventions are still prevalent in the final pieces and my work is looking to intersect and interject a different sonic texture into given formal repertoire. In this way the pieces are reflective of the conversation between my respondents and myself. The sonic pieces represent the fragmented listening habits of a contemporary hybridized musical listening, expressed via analogue means. This has been done in order to shed light on the question of how the vinyl record interfaces with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of personal ownership, and to perhaps show how a creative intervention can unpack the record's ontological complexity?

These compositions also question conventional sampling practices, especially in hip-hop production and wider dance music forms. The scratchy, stuttering, skittish, crunchy broken-ness of the records' playback, bring us back to the question of value and how this attributed through the personal narrative, and also the additive potentials of the material to the experience of listening as theorised by Kelly's 'cracked media' analysis. This is linked to the idea of vinyl's vital materiality, its longevity, and the importance of the marriage of musical form to its storage format. The material impacts directly on the quality of the sound, and it is this correlation, and questions of its semiotic potentials that are also at work here. Cracked or clean, which one represents a broken dream? The discussion here has as its basis theories of the remix exemplified by the theoretical work of Navas, but I concentrate on the work of Schloss, whose analysis on the art of sampling and the politics inherent in these practices of 'theft' have informed my writing in this final chapter.

The idea of traces, shadows of sound and voices, the interwovenness of our musical experiences, is a constant thread running through the fabric of this work. This is exemplified by the use of my respondents' stories at the core of this work. It is these personal narratives that have been gathered in YSLABR in order to find out what material props are required to help manage our identification through music and that provides the creative catalyst for the physical intervention and subsequent compositional methodology that I have engaged with. The compositions could be described in part as sound poems; the muse in each is the respondent and their unique story. As these compositions, do not use the formal melodic or rhythmic structures of popular or classical music, it was awkward to employ to conventional musicological cues to speak about or sonically express different emotional states. Therefore I have turned to Clarke (2007), Demers (2010), and Born (2005) to help consolidate my ideas around this sticky issue of musical representation, especially in the unfamiliar sound worlds of electronic music. I would suggest that this helps me better explain the ways in which I have attempted to best sonically signify the core emotional states in my respondent's

narratives, and express how this creative practice can best unpack the complexity of the multivalent narrative associations embedded in the vinyl record?

YSLABR apprehends some of the splintered fragments of the vinyl records' heterogeneous ontology from the standpoint of a participant / observer. The hope being, that by opening a productive dialogue between industry, user, artefact, artist, music, and society, and through the use of the personal narrative instantiated by creative practice, we can gain some new insights into the ways we are impacted not only by the music, but also the material objects of our listening.

CHAPTER ONE:

RECORDS, ART, MUSIC

‘[i]f life is flux, fixity is death.’ (Eisenberg, 2005: 13)

Music, noise, sound, language, and silence impose themselves on us from every direction. At this moment as I write, my computer is grumbling at me, twittering away, trying to squirrel away my bytes for future retrieval; the radio in the room next door, is bubbling with two female voices that seem to meet me at my feet from under the wall. They are unintelligible yet somehow I know exactly what they are saying, and their muffled conversation comforts me on my own linguistic journey onto the page. The bin men clatter too, and shout between one another, drowned out intermittently by the truck, and the ladies on the radio. They layer onto one another, each clamoring for attention in my soundscape and subsequently live through me and out into this moment of writing. Now, Spandau Ballet, 'True', and now my dog barking, and now my fingers tapping away at the keyboard, and now the scrape of the mouse on the desk, and now my tinnitus, and now some birds just faintly through the whine, and now my voice in my head becomes your voice in yours or my voice imagined in yours as you read on. What we record, how we record it, what those recordings are then used for, and how they are controlled is what is at stake in this chapter.

My analysis will be based around the dialectical position that the vinyl record holds as both symbol of cultural subversion and product of a mass---market industry. I will present a brief history of the ways in which artists in varied fields have subversively manipulated this object, to create a lasting legacy on contemporary uses of the vinyl record in the arts and music. Some of this work has explored the political, material, sonic, and aesthetic properties of the vinyl record, in musical, performative, and gallery spaces, whilst in other instances the record has provided a symbol of subversion from the more constraining aesthetic necessities of the market. The analysis will also provide some insight into the influences of my own practice. My interest in exposing some of the complexities

involved in securing meaning within these black plastic discs, and their lapidary affordances, originate in the works discussed below.

The foundation for this analysis is the re---reading of Adorno (1941) by Richard Middleton (1990), which questions whether the application of Adorno's theory of *standardisation* within a contemporary musical landscape is still useful and telling. I will argue that the record has been used as a catalyst for radical creative practice, not just 'nothing more than the acoustic photograph that the dog so happily recognizes' (Adorno, 1934: 278).

It is a complex piece of black plastic, the record. It does not know where it really belongs. It is a little cultural hobo, which only finds its true place when we decide to have pity on it and bring it in from the cold, wherever that cold might be. In being able to hold and sustain these two opposing positions, and be of immense value in both, the object of the record itself appears to hold a mystical, some might say cryptic value (Dillon, 2005), not only for its die---hard audience of enthusiasts, but also a bevy of academics, artists, and musicians alike. As Eisenberg writes, a 'shelf of records is a row of possible worlds' (Eisenberg, 2005: 205). Records represent a sonic cartographer's notebook; tracking diverse musical journeys across the deserts of Varese, through Burial's concrete graveyards, into Scott Walker's cavernous anguish, back out onto the silver circuitry of Autobahns, tracing the fireflies sharing their love deep in Basho's forest. A myriad of experiences, pressed into the plastic. Yet physically we go nowhere. I've been sitting here in a cul---de---sac staring at the grayness of winter, drawing an imaginary map of nowhere and everywhere simultaneously, external stillness and internal movement driven by those 33.3 revolutions per minute.

We are listening to photos: The image. The replica. Not authentic pleasure but a state described by Barthes as self inflicted trickery where we should 'observe clandestinely the pleasure of others' (Barthes, 1999: 111) in order to find bliss in this 'reported' happiness.

In developing the technology and honing the art of phonography, writing and reproducing sound has opened the floodgates on questions about the nature of our relationship with language, technology, music, art, commerce, time, memory, and ultimately one another. The record embodies a dialectical position where it is at once a corporate mass media product and simultaneously a symbol of the subversive, authentic and unique. Vinyl is a technology that bridges the gap between the living and the dead, between nature and the machine, between art and the market, creativity and mechanization, between performer and audience. It provides a demarcation of the authentic in a way that other listening media seem unable to effectively replicate. The disc's ability to resist near fatal takeovers by other formats is remarkable, and speaks to an inherent humanness. As Bartmanski and Woodward attest, they 'have seen ample evidence of vinyl being a vehicle of cultural competence rather than misguided consumerism, a "cultural performance" that fuses the assets of the heart and reason as it inspires expertise and enchantment' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 177).

The mass---produced record was the most potent symbol of the power of the music industry. One might say that with Emile Berliner's invention of the disc and his introduction of little 'Nipper', the dog listening attentively to 'His Master's Voice', the music industry proper was born. The process of manufacture, and importantly Berliner's insistence on the use of these new technologies to record music rather than just the voice, took recording from the hands of the amateurs into the realms of professional expertise (Osborne, 2012). As Attali states, 'music has become a strategic consumption, an essential mode of sociality for all those who feel themselves powerless before the monologue of the great institutions' (Attali, 1985: 100). Music in this sense frees us from the monotony of the work place, from the grind of daily life. Whatever the style, according to Attali, it provides some element of resistance that still sits comfortably, for the most part within the system that it is allegedly opposed to. It opens up a space where signification can be negated, and pleasure can ensue. Music provides an alternative position, no matter what the form of that music is, Attali would argue. Yet throughout the history of recording, the record has given rise to creative

misuses and subversive practices that have at once revolutionized and disrupted not only the music industry, but also wider cultural creative practices and as corollary the record buying public, or cultural consumers themselves. In so doing, the use of the record has a truly political overtone. Over the years, new articulations of the partnerships of sound and form have produced truly remarkable creative and cultural work. Cox and Warner (2006), Kahn (1999, 2001), Rice (online), Schoonmaker (2010), Celant (1977) and others have made commendable efforts to document the earliest instances of or trace the lineage of 'recordworks' (Celant, 1977). Here I will take a selection of these instances and look at them in detail, to provide some initial links to my practice work that I present in this thesis.

The first experimentation with records began in the early 1920's with artists such as Darius Milhaud varying the speed of playback in order to transform the human voice (Kahn, 1999). In 1922 and 1923, Lazlo Moholy---Nagy wrote two hugely influential essays, 'Production---Reproduction' and 'New Form in Music: Potentialities of the Phonograph', in which the overriding idea was to make the phonograph into a producer of sound in its own right (Cox, 2006: 331). He posited the idea of reconstituting the process of writing sound into a 'man---made' phenomenon. Moholy---Nagy wanted to see what new sounds might be produced if 'grooves were incised by human agency into the wax plate' (Moholy---Nagy, 2006: 332), rather than the mechanical process that was and is employed to produce these sonic texts.

An important point about this idea is not only its outstandingly progressive nature, but also the insistence on human intervention in the creative process, negating the constraints of mass production that would allow the artist to 'smuggle his own spiritual experience into the composition' (Moholy---Nagy, 2006: 332). This mode of thinking also provides us with some precursory glances towards Benjamin's problems surrounding the mechanical reproduction of art outlined in his seminal essay just over a decade later, and also laid a foundation for the DIY aesthetic championed by many subcultural uses of vinyl over the

decades. Moholy---Nagy's approach is indicative of the attempt to destabilize the perceived conflict between music as expression and the constraining forces imposed by the market or technological rules. The boundaries of authorship were being challenged very early in the record's history. Other notable early adopters of the record's new potentials for sound creation and compositional expression were Paul Hindemith and Ernst Toch, whose "*Gramophonmusik*" utilized the gramophone and obviously the records played thereon, to manipulate pitch and timbre in both speech and musical recordings. As Holmes explains, 'rather than using it [the gramophone] to passively record the performance of other music, they experimented with the record player as the instrument itself' (Holmes, 2012: 44). This work is credited with affording the foundational beginnings of what is now coined 'turntablism' (the branch of hip---hop DJing that has extended and refined the intricate manual skills of the DJ in scratching, cutting and manual looping into a fine art and big business). Again in Hindemith and Toch's work, the boundaries between use and misuse are blurred. They reinvent the purpose of the record to suit their own ends, and more importantly to fully explore the new potentialities in sound that the materiality of the record and its schema provides. Cutler has argued that Hindemith and Toch's experiments did not make great inroads in influencing other artists, 'judging by their absence of offspring' (Cutler in Cox, 2006: 145). But I would suggest that this position is short sighted, as even Cutler's own 'Plunderphonic' experiments have their roots in this early repositioning of recorded sound.

It is true to say that after Hindemith and Toch's first forays into this unknown sonic world, composers and artists took some time to pick up the baton of this recently catalyzed sonic fecundity. But in the mid to late 1930's, both John Cage and Edgard Varese start to experiment with turntables and records in their compositions. The first significant piece resulting from these trails is Cage's 'Imaginary Landscape No 1', first performed in 1939. It has been noted that Cage was ambivalent towards records. In fact he described recordings of his indeterminate work as being 'as useful as a postcard' (Tone, 2003: 13). Yet in several of his works, starting with 'Imaginary Landscape No 1', he realized the

potential of the phonograph in producing sonic results never before heard. Cage's philosophy of composition advocated always trying to go beyond music, to negate any signification and just think of the material of sound for its own sake. As he explained in the excellent documentary 'Listen' by Miroslav Sebestik, 'they say, "you mean it's just sounds?" thinking that for something to just be a sound is to be useless, whereas I love sounds just as they are, and I have no need for them to be anything more than what they are. I don't want them to be psychological. I don't want a sound to pretend that it's a bucket or that it's president or that it's in love with another sound. I just want it to be a sound.' (Sebestik, 1992) Cage was attempting to break with tradition in every facet of his compositional practice. His work advocated a freedom from the constraints of signification. It allowed musical autonomy, one that spoke of a wider utopian vision of freedom and presence in the moment. It fractured formula and listened holistically, and importantly part of this vision was enabled by the re---appropriation and a rethinking of the purpose of the record.

Throughout the 40's and 50's, composers using the turntable and records were working within the bounds of the academy in schools that could be defined by their teaching of modernist and art music. Here the motivations to use records were driven by opening up for experimentation with any and all sounds that could be garnered by a slew of new recording and sound producing technologies. Turntables and records found their place in the orchestra including sine wave generators, tape recorders and early synths. The manipulations being used were pushing the boundaries of the mechanical possibilities of the record player itself; these constituted playback speed, tone, and pitch. In addition the simultaneous playback of a number of different records to build cacophonous and indeterminate pieces, all reflected an opposition to the authority of traditional instrumentation, tonality, and the totalizing force of the composer's scored vision. In new sound practices were heard new societal opportunities, and the record was one of the driving forces of this nascent change. It was evident that simultaneously the western society was undergoing huge upheavals politically, economically and ideologically, and the compositions of the time and the

instrumentation they employed were reflective of this struggle. A piece such as 'Imaginary Landscape No 1', with its use of fluctuating test tones producing a foreboding, futuristic cry, coupled with cymbal crashes, crushing percussive use of the piano strings resonating through the depths of the instrument, prophesizes a new sonic aesthetic. As Cage states, 'I just want it to be a sound', yet the feeling one gets from hearing these sounds in the present, thinking about the state of the world at the time of Cage's composition, one can't help but hear the fear of a world about to be plunged into tragedy. What would this piece be without the records? The mirrors he uses to reflect this condition are made of black plastic.

Adorno was a great believer in the power of a modernist musical aesthetic to bring about real, deep, and universal social change. His belief is that composers such as Schoenberg stood in absolute opposition to the 'standardisation' of structure that 'freezes' any experiential potential of popular music. Adorno attempts to convince us that '*structural standardization aims at standard reactions*' (Adorno, 1941: 442). He goes on to explain that the structural concerns of popular music are 'wholly antagonistic to the ideal of individuality in a free and liberal society' (Adorno, 1941: 442). This is quite a claim, even in the context of musical production in which Adorno was writing. As Middleton points out, however, the totalizing theory that Adorno posits leaves a great number of questions unanswered, especially when it comes to the development of new generic practices over the history of musical composition. Adorno's theory gives no quarter to, for example, the work of John Coltrane, who completely removes notions of standardization by reworking simplistic, unsophisticated tunes into opuses of free expression and improvisation. I think one would find it extremely difficult to justify a reading of Coltrane playing 'My Favorite Things' as 'only embellishments' (Adorno, 1941: 446), as Adorno would have us believe.

Middleton states 'even though the musical language is seen as totally shop soiled, then, it is still possible to rearticulate the fragments' (Middleton, 1990: 42). The inclusion of Coltrane's 1965 album 'A Love Supreme' on the Guardian's list '1000 Albums You Must Hear Before you Die' might be a measure of its contamination

by the market, but for some listeners it has transcended its earthly bounds and speaks directly of the higher realms of existence. The Archbishop Franzo King and Reverend Mother Marina King founded the Saint John Coltrane African Orthodox Church after seeing the saxophonist playing in 1965. The website reads:

‘Seeing John Coltrane and hearing his sound that night was that familiar feeling he knew since childhood. It was the presence of God. Archbishop King refers to this as a ‘sound baptism’ which touched their hearts and minds.’ (King, online)

Although this is an extreme example it clearly shows how the totalizing scope of Adorno’s theory is untenable as this is definitely not a ‘standard reaction’ to music (Adorno, 1941: 442). The complexity inherent in the social practices and evolution of music and sound requires a much more flexible and nuanced approach to analysis, as no one genre of musical production exists outside of the system of mass production. If one is to truly evaluate the social impact of a particular music, then it must be assessed in its own specificity, and the uses of the record within these paradigms allow us some important insights. As Middleton points out ‘Adorno draws the net too tightly’ (Middleton, 1990: 43).

In this regard I am eager to show that even though the use of the record and the phonograph was at first grounded in the art music aesthetic, it was not just in that milieu that the record was seen as having powerful transformative value in rethinking both sound and the materiality of music. If Adorno failed to see how different practices in popular music produced seemingly new and apparently original ways of hearing the world, then in my estimation the record highlights this blind---spot. I position the record at the center point of a cross---disciplinary cultural exchange. For it is within a plethora of dispersed environments that the record has built its formidable cultural value, and these multidisciplinary contexts make up a huge part of its social importance. The record is a social entity with a social voice and much art music was (and arguably still is) anti---social. As Shepard reminds us, ‘It [art music] was assumed to embody within

itself universal, “otherworldly” values and truths immune to the impact of everyday life’ (Shepard, 2003: 70). Indeed, art music’s antipathy to exploring the sociality of music had victims in its own ranks. The composer Luc Ferrari recalls how he had to remind his fellow ‘*music concrete*’ composers that ‘creators and artists don’t live outside of society. Their history unfolds in the thick of the most brutal and terrible events’ after making work that they deemed to be overtly representational (Caux, 2002: 47). The record spins through these boundaries and has repeatedly become a locus for the enmeshing of the popular and the exclusive, as its uses and therefore meaningfulness have retained a dissident undertone. The record has veered off the industrial conveyor belt in tangential directions in both art and musical environments, yet still is markedly universal depending on what you impress onto its surface.

The adoption of cross---disciplinary thinking in the arts, and the slippage of traditional cultural practices throughout the 60’s and 70’s saw a significant crossover between the art and music scenes in this period. The record as a consequence became a seminal part of many different sub---cultural and artistic movements at this time. In opposition to the fixed categorical boundaries through which Adorno preferred to view artistic practices, Middleton reminds us of a much more realistic picture in talking about music, but which can also be applied to the visual arts, where we see ‘a cyclical pattern of continual conflict between conservative major companies and ‘grassroots’ independents and entrepreneurs: breakthrough---assimilation---breakthrough---assimilation’ (Middleton, 1990: 38). It is pertinent to my work that the breakthroughs were not just in one discipline. Music learnt from art and vice versa. Equally telling was that popular music was borrowing from ‘art’ music. Alex Ross rounds up some of these crossovers, ‘The Beatles cited Stockhausen as a model and hired an orchestra to play ad libitum on “A Day in the Life.” The Byrds modeled their hyped---up guitar work in “Eight Miles High” on space age Coltrane. The Velvet Underground placed surreally pretty fragments of pop amid firestorms of overlapping guitars. And Frank Zappa borrowed abrasive harmonies from Edgard Varese.’ (Ross, 2010: 219) The more market---savvy popsters allowed these ideas to

bleed out of the records and onto album covers and images too. Recording artists took control over the aesthetics and valued the communicative purposes of the object too, not just those of the music.

UK art schools had a great reputation during this period in producing revolutionary and massively influential musicians. Names like Brian Eno, Mick Jones and Paul Simonon of the Clash, Paul Dean of X-Ray Spex, Viv Albertine of The Slits and many others were all from art school backgrounds (Frey: 1986). But the leader of the gang was indisputably Malcolm McLaren, the erstwhile manager of the Sex Pistols. Using 'Situationist' rhetoric, bringing back Rock and Roll aesthetics to re-imagine the future, McLaren brought an academic art practice approach into the popular musical milieu. As Frey observes, 'the attitude had more in common with the artist, than with the economic aspirations commonly associated with the gifted, upwardly mobile, working class malcontent' (Frey, 1986: 2). In a heady mix of the pseudo-political, anarchic, dissident, noisy, young and downright irreverent, McLaren created a musical iteration that has proven to be iconic. And the weapon of choice for this cultural revolution? The humble 45.

Elborough notes that independent punk labels, 'in opposition to the indulgences of the era, pursued a policy of cutting records, mainly 7-inch EPs, cheaply and cheerfully with local scenesters – an enterprise that proved a vital component in English punk' (Elborough, 2009: 328). The punk attitude towards the industry around this time was very simple; sabotage. The adoption of the 45 as the format of choice for the punk movement perfectly reflected this. At a time when the major labels and major artists were spending a great deal of time and money perfecting the LP, the punks eschewed this vision completely, by adopting the 45. The famous DIY ethos was well and truly born out of this period: don't rely on the major companies, just get it out there. Punk took the single back, with its political rhetoric, picture sleeves and the adoption of the rock and roll aesthetic, and in doing so reinvigorated the charts. It essentially made the single cool again, and the majors adopted many of its marketing ploys. All the tactics being used to

try and destabilize the industry just provided a creative catalyst and folded back in on themselves to produce 'punk' bands who chased the chart positions anyway. McLaren was guiltier than anyone in this regard, as he constantly courted the majors to try and secure the most commercially significant deal he could for the Sex Pistols. Jon Savage's seminal book 'England's Dreaming' exhaustively details this chase for the deal and highlights how a punk ethos is nigh on impossible to maintain whilst also trying to expand your audience. The following anecdote highlights this perennial dialectic of 'crossing over'. In a recent interview I conducted with an ex--worker of the EMI pressing plant in Hayes, Middlesex, she divulged that some of the more conservative factory workers mutinied when it came to the Pistols. So much so that the record came close to not leaving the factory floor. She explains further, 'The controversy about the Sex Pistols album was that the ladies in the picking lanes wouldn't touch the Sex Pistols' bollocks' (Sue, 2013), meaning that the workers refused to even touch this record to pack it for distribution, such was the furor over its content. Here we have the inherent complexity in the iterative progression of the musical world and what it represents. It could be happily assumed that the records that Adorno so despised, those of the Tin Pan Alley era, were the very records that the 'ladies in the picking lanes' would have listened to. Can Adorno's critique be applied here, where popular music listening is done 'according to institutionalized prescriptions capable of producing only institutionalized effects' (Adorno, 1941: 215)? What Adorno does not account for however is the fact that the two song forms use repetition. One is no more complex structurally than the other, which is problematic for the application of the idea of standardization creating block effects across all popular music listenership. This theoretical basis does not, for example, account for the actual sound of the record, which one supposes Adorno would describe only as detail. Middleton writes that the history of music can be seen as 'a constantly mutating organism made up of elements which are symbiotic and mutually contradictory *at the same time*' (Middleton, 1990: 38). My perception would be that this organism also includes visual art and literature as well as environmental experience, and each record produced is a mutated cell containing information from all these areas of creative work, making the picture

ever more complex and interesting for exploration. The connections between the record and hip-hop, reggae, and disco also can't be forgotten, and have been well documented by other writers, (Toop, 1984), Brewster and Broughton (2006), Osborne (2012)). These are influences that inform my own practice and that I will expand on in subsequent chapters.

What is striking however, are the links between art practice and the ideas that were driving these music scenes. In the context of the late 70's, the artist, and arguably best known vinyl artist, Christian Marclay recalls, 'I'd see Sid Vicious do something one night at Max's Kansas City, and then Dan Graham the next night at the Mudd Club, or things by Laurie Anderson. There was a very interesting mix between club culture with some art events and punk rock.' (Kahn, 2003: 19) This enmeshing of forms and disciplines can be traced back to the 20's and the Dadaists, whose work extended its artistic practice into the realms of sound and music. As Richter recalls of one early Dada gathering in Zurich, '[t]hen followed music by Hans Heusser, whose tunes or anti-tunes had accompanied Dada since its inauguration at the Cabaret Voltaire' (Richter, 1965: 78). Dada was synonymous with opposition; they wanted to 'administer a strong purgative to an age riddled with lies' (Richter, 1965: 91). By bringing together action, sound, and the everyday into the 'holy' space of the gallery, they were able to produce the world in a different hue, one that indelibly marked the thinking of many creative minds in their wake. It must be mentioned that any sculptural or visual work done with vinyl records is done in the presence of Marcel Duchamp, whose re-appropriation of the found object, the 'ready-made', carved the way for the likes of Christian Marclay and members of Dada's progeny the Fluxus group.

Marclay was not the first to take the record off the turntable and let it spin new webs of signification in the gallery setting. He was in fact working as a direct descendant of the Fluxus artist Milan Knizak. In his trailblazing work 'Broken Music' from 1963, Knizak provided the template to completely negate the reverence sometimes associated with the vinyl record. He took the record and destroyed it. As he explains in his artist's statement, 'achieve the widest variety of

sound' (Knizak: online). Later in his career on moving back to Czechoslovakia from the US, he didn't see his art as being 'anti' art, as the Fluxus movement or the Dadaists would have conceived of it. Instead he saw his art as providing a new means of communication that would 'provide revolution in everyday life' (Mezzzone, 2009: 82). He explained further with regard specifically to objects that it is not the object that is the result of the act of creation but instead 'the results are the changes in everyday life of every person who is affected by these things' (Mezzzone, 2009: 82). The records he created used the record on a number of different levels, that of musical notation, that of sounding material, and the aesthetic. This denoted a change in direction for the record. Early adopters of the record as a platform for experimentation were using it more for its ability to create new sounds alone, however, Knizak, following in the footsteps of the Duchamp, used inscriptions on the ready-made-ness of the object to 'carry the mind of the spectator towards other regions' (Richter, 1965: 89). Knizak brings about the transformation of thinking about the thing itself. Osborne reminds us that '[s]ongs created for and purchased as vinyl discs became songs thought of as vinyl discs' (Osborne, 2012: 72). In the 'Broken Records' work this is even more pronounced, as the fissures that create the sounds that we hear have been amplified for us to see. The blobs of glue, the cuts, the paint, the breaks and cracks, all these prevent and invent simultaneously. The records in their indeterminacy produce a new relationship between the thingness of the recording and the thingness of sound itself. In their indeterminacy they behave in significantly different ways remolding the process of signification. There becomes a new model for treating the grooved inscription of the original recording; the voice that was originally chosen for its professional qualities, for its ability to communicate to the mass audience, has been negated, and so the lines of communication between the object and ourselves have been spun away into a new paradigm. By vandalizing these records Knizak opposes the function of the record that Attali conceives of as a 'tool making the individualized stockpiling of music possible on a huge scale' (Attali, 1985: 32). He produces it as being unique once again.

In creating this 'Broken Music', Knizak re---communicates the record. He does this at a time in his career when the revolutionary potential of art had not been literally arrested. Attali states that 'a network can be destroyed by noises that attack and transform it' (Attali, 1985: 33). This line of thinking employs the idea that there is a system of control over this network that is open to destruction. In all the examples we have seen above, the record has played a pivotal role in being able to channel, share, and articulate a new position of artistic and musical practice. Even though many of these uses of the record did not have a wide audience at their time, as I have attempted to show, many of the ideas from the avant---garde have made their way into more popular musical forms, and subsequently into the materiality of the record itself. One just has to think about the work of Brian Eno, who has been able to bridge the gap between art music and the pop world in a long and established career. It is this layering of sounds and ideas, the subsumption of certain modes and tropes into others, and the political impact of this, that will be covered in subsequent chapters.

To have and to hold, to change and to mold, the record shows itself as the site for a constant struggle between artist and market to control the means of signification, a characteristic that makes this object a hugely rich seam to mine in order to better understand the complex and unpredictable relationship with music that many of us are engaged in everyday. The record has become more than just a carrier of sound. It is also a carrier of new social attitudes coupled with new sonic sensibilities, when disengaged from its systems of production.

CHAPTER TWO:

AUTHORIAL MURDER, PALIMPSESTS AND RESURRECTION

What we once thought we had, we didn't,
 and what we have now will never be that way again
 So we call upon the author to explain
 I CALL UPON THE AUTHOR TO EXPAIN!!!!!!
 (Nick Cave, 2008)

This chapter focuses on a single research interview, a discussion with my participant Sheena. It combines the concept of the palimpsest, writing on top of writing, with Barthes's notion of the 'Death of the Author' to offer a new, more poetic, approach to the ontology of the vinyl record.

Sound, and as a corollary music, has long posed problems of interpretation; as Born points out, 'music sound is non---representational, non---artefactual and alogogenic.' She goes on to note that, due to this lack of denotative meaning, 'musical sound engenders a profusion of extra musical connotations of various kinds – visual, sensual, emotional and intellectual' (Born, 2011: 377). As language provides symbols of signification, culturally constructed, complex yet standardised, music and sound work outside of these semiotic bounds. Attali makes the point that a commodity needs to be able to represent in order to be commercially viable. One has to sell something that is meaningful to the buyer. To make the apparently meaningless (sound and music) meaningful, especially in a world built around ocular dominance, the industry must create paratexts ready for commodification around the sonic object in order to explain it. Martin Irvine, quoting Bordieu's theory of collective misrecognition, makes a similar point saying, '[w]e are continually socialized into maintaining --- under heavy ideological pressure --- ways of preserving the misrecognition of sources, authors, origins, works, and derivations in order to sustain these social categories as

functions in the political economy and the intellectual property legal regime for cultural goods' (Irvine, 2015: 17). Bartmanski and Woodward also describe this process as the industry developing 'master narratives that seem to govern the production and reception of culture' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 102). So music, despite what many of us like to think, does not float free of its representational bolt-ons, whether they are discursive, social, or visual. But these multiple mediations cause tension. Not only can some musicological writing, as Chan succinctly observes, 'reduce vibrant musics to lifeless corpses fit for autopsy' (Chan, 1998: 93), but these mediations also interfere with the individual experience of listening. These paratexts are not solely reductive, however they can be simultaneously instructive. They allow us to contextualize our listening; in many cases they play an important pedagogic role. However, they can also be problematic because they are often hegemonic in character. They can be compromised by their modes and contexts of their production, historically fixing meaning to music and therefore playing a vital role in the maintenance of a certain story of music, a form whose ontology is not that simple to apprehend. If we want to fully realize the communicative potential of music and to see all the nuances of its effects, to provide us with a 'thickness' of expression that goes beyond that of the market expectation, whilst also valuing the role of these systems to provide the space for the production of rogue elements, the stories of the non-expert, the part-time music fan, the ones who lost interest at some time along the way, are equally as important to unpack. As Hesmondhalgh (2013) highlights in his work, music can't always be discussed in terms of exuberance and joyousness, sometimes it is the darker, more troubling aspects of our sociality that it speaks to, those moments where words fail us. If we want to fully appreciate the complexity of our own musical journey and allow for this engagement to provide us with a 'thickness' of experience that goes beyond that of mechanization, to reevaluate the power of our subjectivity, one starts to be persuaded by Barthes's compulsion to kill the genius author. As Burke notes, 'to impose an author on a text is to impose an archaic monoism on a brave new pluralist world.' (Burke: 1998, 24), and in the multifarious life of the record this would be an especially reductive approach.

Barthes writes, '[t]he *explanation* of the work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voices of a single person, the *author* 'confiding' in us.' (Barthes, 1977: 143). In the music industry this is the process of creating the star, producing the saleable image, writing the commodified narrative that at once demystifies and simultaneously mythologizes in a process that potentially freezes form and stifles creativity. Although I don't posit the totalizing effects of the professional critical voice over the discourse of music, its influence cannot be ignored. Musical meaning is not created autonomously by the object of music itself, and as Middleton writes, '[a]ll music existing and newly produced, is unavoidably affected, its meaning becoming more obviously contingent' (Middleton, 1990: 95). By focussing on the story and record of just one of my respondents, I will attempt to highlight some of the conflicting, reflective, and interweaving narratives to explore their tensions and productivities as they are played out on, in, and through the material and text of the vinyl record, with Barthes's philosophy as a backdrop to the discussion. These narratives reposition the record too as a complex, vibrant repository and mediator of our sometimes ignored inner selves. The weight of the records' gravity spins us out in new directions, into a variety of life choices that change the trajectory of our existences, for example when Tony first heard the Buzzcocks and became 'like a drug addict, hung up the football boots, and after that it was music every single night' (Tony, 2015).

Looking to the 'destination' of the musical text by speaking to those who have developed a personal connection with these objects, new perspectives are highlighted: perspectives that may be able to reposition an individual subjectivity in the hierarchy among industry, listener, music, object and the artist that they have called upon with the stab of a diamond---tipped needle. Each disc represents a series of times, spaces, and experiences woven together through the continued use of the record in new settings and new contexts throughout its life cycle. For me, Bob Marley's 'Catch a Fire', 1973, first press, in the fold---out Zippo sleeve, is not just an album that I love dearly because of its musical content and its rarity,

but it is also the memory of finding the money that I bought it with in a Christmas card given by a kind aunt and uncle. They too have become the story of that record. In fact it is as much theirs as it is mine. I remember vividly seeing it on the wall in Astonishing Sounds in Burnley, just after Neil had moved the shop from Northgate in Blackburn, and being filled with hope that I would actually be able to hold it in my hands. The intense feeling of excitement tinged with trepidation at handing over what I thought was a crazy amount of money for a record, whilst at the same time glowing inside that I had taken down my charge, is one that I feel each time I look at the cover, let alone pick the 'thing' up. Being able to buy it was linked to luck, success, competition, but also love. I loved Bob, and this was a way of showing that love, the first press, knowing about it, caring about it, letting other people know I cared about it. This moment in time where the power was wrested from the hegemony of rock music and placed into the hands and voices of a group of ghetto boys --- I held the symbol of that shift, it made me part of it, and it made me feel that I could effect the inequalities of power that I perceived as my 16---year---old self. And now where is it? Locked away in storage, and I'm frustrated that I can't excavate it to relive its sounds as I write this. I feel as though I've let it down, how can this be possible, it's just a record after all? But it's the symbolic power it holds of speaking to my personal hopes for the future that is telling. It's not that I've let the record down; I've somehow failed its ideals, and thinking of it reminds me of that. It's bittersweet. I knew of the record because I had read about it in Timothy White's biography of the dreadlocked star. It was through him that I understood the record to be important, its novelty packaging was more than just a gimmick, it represented the fact that Island records had the faith to push this music, it was an exercise in belief. Tim told me that...

The record, then, has an existence in my memory that is constructed by a series of narratives intertwining to create the object as I know it. All these disparate elements, drawn across space and time come to make up the gestalt of ownership. The relationship is not developed in isolation, and even though one can love a piece of music, a record or an artist in the confines of one's private

space, this love is also shared with those around us. These are some of the ‘social imaginaries afforded by music’ (Born, 2011: 379), and are extremely important in trying to ascertain the subjective value of such objects. My interviewees talk about friends, family, places, spaces, journalists, TV, film, and the wider cultural landscape as wrapped up in their emotional attachment to the object. These disparate elements are very much a part of the complexity, and for some the beauty, of the record’s significance. ‘I just remember loads of people liking that kind of thing, and playing it and getting to know people through stuff like that.’ (Adam, 2015)

These experiences layer and shift over time, they build up on the record’s surface like dust, forming a patina through which the music changes its hue. These layers build up and intertwine creating what Derrida describes as an ‘assemblage’ of writing, that suggests how the text has ‘the structure of interlacing, a weaving, or a web, which would allow the different threads and different lines of sense or force to separate again, as well as being ready to bind others together’ (Derrida, 2008: 127). By lifting one layer away from another, a personal ecology may be found that unveils the nuances of the object and shows how and where that object came to be its present self, how it accumulated its ‘thing’ power. For Rob Young ‘[r]ecords are more than just containers of music; they are cultural artefacts in their own right. They are repositories of memory, carriers of deep personal associations, and... bearers of entrenched cultural hegemony’ (Young, 2010: 160). My interview with Isabel supports this point as she explains ‘I don’t want to lose them because they’re my history.’ (Isabel, 2013)

The unique materiality of the record affords it multifunctional capacities as sonic storage, art object, and pedagogic prompt, carrier of the subversive and mainstream simultaneously, making the ontological ambiguity at play in the vinyl record troublesome to unpick. Yet there are some familiar voices that reach us through the chains of interrelationships linked by the groove that act like silken threads of signification inscribed into the lives of the listener.

Palimpsests appeared in the medieval world as writing was a costly pursuit and consequently was tightly controlled. Parchment was incredibly expensive and so new scripts had to be written on top of old. Vellum sheets were scrubbed clean in order for this new writing to take place, yet this erasure proved to be impermanent. Over the years the original writing began to bleed back through the newly inscribed work as prolonged exposure to the atmosphere generated 'a ghostly trace... in the following centuries as the iron in the remaining ink reacted with the oxygen in the air, producing a reddish---brown oxide' (Dillon, 2005: 245). In this way a spoor of history is intertwined with the present of the text, as Gosta highlights, '...the writing of the past penetrates the writing of the present, and poses an interruption to the presents unfolding in the very presentation of itself' (Gosta, 2011: 708). The power relations of the time, engendered in the mechanizations of writing, could literally be read in the temporally entwined, twisting inscriptions contained on the one page. The restrictive cost of new parchment meant that decisions had to be made as to which texts would be preserved and which would be erased. Daughtry points out that subversive pagan mythology was often rewritten with the word of God. That which was deemed valueless was literally erased. Silencing voices written, as well as spoken, constructed the future in the image of the powerful. However over the course of time, these lost voices reappeared, and in doing so illuminated the political structuring of previous communities through this discursive positioning.

Aristotle wrote 'spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols of spoken words' (Aristotle, 350BC, online). So written words make noise! For example in the act of reading this you are allowing me to speak, my voice in my head becomes your voice in yours or my voice imagined in yours as you read on. Attali states that '[b]y listening to noise we can better understand where the folly of men and their calculations is leading us, and what hopes it is possible to have' (Attali, 1985: 3). He goes on to posit that trying to write a genealogy of music is an impossible task as old and new forms are constantly overlapping and trying in vain to find a place to settle; meaning is cumulatively constructed over time, it is a topography that is constantly

changing, literally from moment to moment. One cannot apprehend one moment in this evolution and have full confidence in its meaning without first taking the trouble to position it within the whole landscape. It is a landscape that is liminal and shifting, producing itself across a huge variety of influences in what Born calls ‘multi temporalities.’ According to Attali in order to start to start to analyze this, ‘[w]hat must be constructed then is more like a map, a structure of interferences and dependencies between music and society’ (Attali, 1985: 3). As music constantly struggles to be freed of its past both sonically and sociologically, its past forms, traditions, and conventions continue to resonate in its present. No matter how hard it tries, through its different mutations and paradigms of modern practice, the dream of originality is always a beat away. Therefore in order to properly constitute a history of music one must forgo the idea of completism. Yet thinking about the enmeshments in a ‘palimpsestuous’ (Dillon, 2005) way can draw some new roads on Attali’s map, even if finding and accounting for every byway is a cartographic impossibility. Eisenberg writes that ‘[a] record is a world: ‘It is the world scratched by man in a form that may survive him’ (Eisenberg, 2005: 210). Thus the record becomes our guide. It can act as a sonic cartographer’s notebook forming triangulation points from which to navigate our tangled musical landscapes and to try and find our place amongst the increasing range of actors engaged with maintaining its trunk roads.

Thinking about the record as a layer in the ever accreting palimpsest of a personal musical journey allows for us to ‘trace multiple histories, and multiple authors’ (Daughtry, 2014: 4), and in so doing we approach the object dialectically. Daughtry, quoting Andreas Huyssen speaking about architectural palimpsests, describes being able to ‘read these spaces intertextually and recovering “present pasts” from the abyss of cultural amnesia’ (Daughtry, 2014: 5). In other words, in a displacement of this idea from the architectural to the culturally material, the vinyl record produces a site that witnesses these intertwining ‘present pasts’.

The idea of the palimpsest is especially telling in the case of tracing some of the meandering ontology of the vinyl record because the record itself goes through a

physical transformation every time it is played, as David Toop rather dramatically notes: '[t]he needle plough[s] through the spiralled groove, wearing away both itself and the music it transmits. Each performance writes its own slow suicide note.' (Toop, 2003: 126---7). The action of the needle reading the groove causes a deterioration of the records' surface, and the degenerative work of time and physical context also plays its tune on the physical nature of the grooves and consequently is telling of its history. It speaks of the objects' uniqueness and personal connection, in a way that gives value to the demotic:

'I mean you look at my copy of it, it's a mess because I battered it to pieces, I mean, I can't even clean no more, and 'Chemistry' which is on the flip side, which not any people played, which is probably the best track, or the one that I most like, is scratched at the end, but I've kept it because it's the original copy, it's the one I bought originally.' (Alex, 2015)

So can the multilayered writing of the palimpsest offer us an analytical tool when thinking about the vinyl record and our relationships to it? The metaphor of the palimpsest can work on various levels here. It is at once the structuring of the text of the record itself through its means of production and its subsequent marketing comprising the paratexts created to support and explain its existence. And it is equally the process of memory formation that has given rise to the complex formation of the text in the mind of the listener. Musical memories are extremely complex beasts, liminal, labile, and multivalent. Constantly in flux and continually unfolding in a nexus of family, friends, places, and spaces internal and external. Caught between the highly personal and the paratexts of the industry, bound in love and loss, technologically constituted but bedded in our corporeality; shifting temporally, based in the past and emergent through present experience, produced by 'several people writing together' (Barthes, 1977: 144), these memories become 'palimpsestuous'. The beauty of the palimpsest is a gestalt complexity where each individual participant (I think here of participants also as sounds, writings, videos, and so on, not just people) is nominally sealed beneath the next user, yet the participants' voice is faintly audible through the

morass of enmeshed experiential fibers that make up its ever---changing surface. So the palimpsest is fluid, mirroring the constant writing and erasure of sound across our auditory space. As we are subjected to a fragmented sonic journey dispersed through a myriad of narratives that are constantly inflected by our subjective position in the soundscape, the text of the record is caught in what Barthes describes as ‘a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture’ (Barthes, 1977: 146). It could be argued then that Barthes is actually describing the palimpsestuous nature of the text in his analysis. In constructing the text we are, in Dillon’s words, producing an ‘involved phenomenon where otherwise unrelated texts are involved and entangled, intricately interwoven, interrupting and inhabiting each other’ (Dillon, 2005: 244). There is something very Barthesian about this for me. In addition if we are to take up Barthes’s assertion that ‘the text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination’ (Barthes, 1977: 148) as stated previously, then in my work the respondents’ framing of the importance of the record to them ‘is necessary to overthrow the myth’ of the genius musical voice, and resurrect the owners’ subjectivity.

Let me introduce Sheena. She gave me her original copy of ‘Station to Station’ by David Bowie that she ‘bought when it came out, ... in 1976, and I was sixteen.’ I’ll let her take up the story:

‘I bought it in Windham, which is a small market town in Norfolk, which is where I was living at the time ... I was already a huge Bowie fan, I had all his other albums, the reason this one is so significant is that it made me take, probably a different course in life ... It opened my eyes to something I realised I wanted, maybe it was because I was sixteen and trusted him because I was such a big fan, where he was going influenced where I was going ... I was just beginning to think I can’t stand being in Norfolk much longer ... I want to travel and I want to discover the world, when I bought this record, and knew what was happening in the artist’s life, it just made me think god, I can’t wait to get out there.’ (Sheena: 2014)

This record allowed Sheena to see Windham differently, it opened up a portal to the imagined 'new world' that was waiting full of promise, if only the reality of the present would free the young Sheena from its shackles. The record represented escape for young Sheena surrounded by posters of the 'Thin White Duke' in her bedroom, head buried in a copy of the New Musical Express --- 'I was an avid reader of the NME, probably unhealthily obsessed by it' --- dreaming of following her hero into fresh and exciting worlds. As Eisenberg poetically imagines, '[w]hen a record is lifted over the platter, a transparency or slide is fitted over a segment of space and time. The effect is a double exposure.' (Eisenberg, 2005: 206) This speaks directly to the metaphor of our palimpsest. It may be only an imaginary moment, but as Hesmondhalgh explains further, 'music's distinctive language is one of compressed and elliptical reference to our inner lives and our prospects ... it is close to dreaming in this respect' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 16). Sheena is looking into the Woolworths window in Windham, and seeing herself in Bowie's little clique heading for Hanza studios.

'...he went to Europe, he went to Berlin in fact, and that just chimed with me, because I was doing French and German, I was really interested in Europe, I read that he had come to hate America, and the other thing that is relevant here is that, I'd been to America a few times because I've got a really weird family background, which meant that my Mum married an American airman when I was quite young, had my sister and they went to America. And I had this really strange childhood, where I didn't really know where I belonged, and I went to America a few times, and in rural Norfolk no---one went outside, so I said I'd never been anywhere. It's really interesting in that I didn't count America...' (Sheena: 2014).

Here we can get a glimpse further into the fabric of the story that makes this record so important for Sheena. The story of her family and her relationship to them is inscribed into its grooves. She says that she 'trusted' Bowie, that she wanted to follow him to Europe, and like him was unable to come to terms with the idea that America had any romance attached to it whatsoever. America had

wronged them both. Love was to be found in the futuristic potency, sophistication, and elegant quietude of Europe.

The record spoke to Sheena of the one world being subsumed into another. 'The album before that was 'Young Americans' which was very soul, very black, um, soul music, influence which I also loved, um, the albums after it were, the Berlin trilogy, which were all very electronic, and experimental, and so this was a kind of combination of the two, it's a transitional record, and it's, you know, very much, um, um, very respected for that now but, it's got a lot of soul in it, it's got a lot of melody and emotion, but it's also got some really hard, you know, harsh electronic, um influences as well, and was, it's, it's, it's just, it was a bit of a gear crunch, I think, kind of a record, and that, I just felt that was a gear crunch time in my life and it, it, sort of resonated with me.'

It is interesting when considering the paratexts that surround Sheena's emotional connection with the record that she doesn't speak of lyrics. Instead she speaks of sounds used and the juxtaposition of the new and the conventional. The album itself opens with a phased train recording (echoing the work of Pierre Schaffer's music concrete output), which pans across the stereo field, and is processed to the point of near abstraction. This floats into a wailing electric guitar that maintains its place in the background of the mix just playing noises and tones rather than notes. A slow, open, minimal soul---esque but angular groove enters center stage. Some dissonant organs and synths fill the spaces behind this central drum and bass duo, fulfilling Sheena's assertion that the mix between harsh electronic sounds and soulfulness was the experimental and transitional aesthetic of this record. In the arrangement of the title track Bowie's conflicting influences can be heard. The song 'Station to Station' is literally split in two halves, the slower crunchy roller turning on its head to become a pulsating disco stomper in the second half of the journey. We hear disparate directions developing into a coherent sound. We hear Bowie and his band trying to make sense of a number of contingent sonic experiences. The music takes on new sounds he has been hearing through the medium of recording, sounds he is

chasing, indicating that he wants to get to in Berlin, the sounds of bands like Neu, Kraftwerk, and Can. It is evident that Sheena hears into the layers of this record and recognizes her own situation reflected right back at her. The tension of her current situation trying to break free from the constraints of both the past and the future played out through dissonance in the present. New sounds are vying for space with the old, new forms are taking over in the soundscape and the memory of the immanent becoming of the self, that this record sonically represents for her, remains traceable in the palimpsest of experience, overlaid with the passing of time. No matter how many years have passed by, the entanglements are still inscribed and are evidently legible for Sheena in the grooves of this record. She relates the story with great passion, and the detailed description and knowledge she displays are arresting. ‘The palimpsest enables something that has disappeared from sight to resurrect; a trace to linger’ (Bartolini, 2014: 520). I suppose the question is, would she have had the same reaction to this record without the NME, without the obvious retrospective reading, without the interferences from remembered images from Bowie’s film, “The Man Who Fell To Earth”, which provided the cover image for the record. Would it have touched her in the same way without these socializing accretions onto the text itself? Born describes the musical object as a ‘constellation of mediations’ (Born, 2011: 377), which I find to be an extremely useful way to describe it, texts and counter texts invisibly linked like silken threads of light reaching and interacting with one another in the black space of the records’ surface.

As we can ascertain from just this tiny snippet of Sheena’s story, her relationship with this record is very personal and special to her. For example, at the end of the interview, holding the record in her hands for the last time before handing it to me, she said, ‘that was the object that made me feel so strongly that made me make one decision rather than another, it’s quite sobering actually, humbling you could say (laughs)...’ The power of the ‘thing’ to evoke such deep feelings and to be able to store influential memories is evident here, but does not tell us the whole story.

Sheena was obviously in love with Bowie, 'I sort of thought of him as a soul mate, and I just trusted him, he just always seemed to reflect where I was, he was always showing me the next thing.' In the way she tells the story it could be read that she trusted him more than she trusted her own family. As with any great story, however, there must always be the 'helper', as defined by Propp, who aids our hero in their success. Sheena's helper during this time was the famous music magazine the New Musical Express: 'When I was growing up, because it was strange you know, the family situation, I was an only child in a quite out of the way place, and music was important to me, you know the New Musical Express was my life---line, that led me into my career, which was working in record shops for many years.'

Sheena is extremely knowledgeable not only about Bowie, but the wider musical milieu. She eloquently expresses an evolutionary taxonomy of bands and records that were influenced by or influenced Bowie, and so found their way into her own listenership. She speaks of Bowie's oeuvre not only with passion and enthusiasm, but also with great detail and factual expertise. For example, she elucidates on Bowie's use of the cut---up method when writing lyrics, describing the process as Bowie taking a 'meta---approach'. Yet this understanding is not coming from the record itself, and one can be quite certain that it is not coming from Bowie himself.

So we must then think carefully about the influence of the NME as an important layer in the palimpsestuous whole of Sheena's listening and the formation of her relationship with this record and the music it carries. Although Sheena has engaged deeply with the writings in the NME over the period of her extensive involvement in music, this is not the sole narrative of her experience. It is intertwined with her own story, her personal interaction with the record, and her road drawn on the map of its apprehension. The NME becomes a conduit for Sheena to embrace the detail of her hero's life. The writings become a way of contextualizing his experience, and it provides a hook for her to attach herself to

a position inside this music generally, but specifically inside the expression of Bowie's alienated experiences. '...for many years being passionate about music was a big part of my identity, I suppose I wanted people to know...' She obviously loves/d Bowie, and felt a kinship, a closeness, an emotional bond, through the music he was part of creating. She was able to identify herself through these sounds he presented, the songs he fostered. This knowledge and the sharing of this passion required an empirical as well as emotional subjectivity, which could then be shared and allow for what we see now as a rounded and comprehensive understanding of his work and its relation to her as an individual.

The NME provided the basis to consolidate what Hesmondhalgh refers to as music's 'semiotic indefiniteness' that 'gives it a superior power to engage with our emotions' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 16). Sheena does repeat the canonical information about the work, the process of lyric writing, the places of creation, and the musical expression channeling Bowie's interior tensions. Barthes explains that by 'allotting itself the important task of discovering the Author (or its hypostases: society, history, psyche, liberty) beneath the work: when the Author has been found, the text is 'explained' victory to the critic' (Barthes, 1977: 147). This explanation provides further dialectical enmeshments within the 'palimpsestuous' reading of the vinyl record. Sheena's use of the NME to become closer to the author himself, to better understand the music that she loves, could be read as a reductive process. The temporal elisions that make up the palimpsest articulate a constant becoming, where the text is never stagnant and is constantly in flux, knowing that it is equally past, present, and future subsequently. The constant iterations open the text to the imagination of the listener, allowing us to explore the poetics of music's materiality. Therefore, the totalizing effects of the industrial voice which silences all individuals under its blanket of white noise in no way account for the kind of collusion that we find in stories such as Sheena's. It could be said that these paratexts maintain the status of the author that Barthes so convincingly killed, and in part, the impact on the listeners' imagination is a regressive one --- looking for meaning outside of the text does not allow one to fully immerse oneself in the act of listening. Yet through the

palimpsest the promise of resurrection is always possible, all the voices remain, and have the potential to be unveiled again to produce new and productive alliances at the point of the text's destination.

My sculptural practice is a visual, sonic and physical continuation of the ideas posited above. The material of the vinyl record afforded me a different space for the exploration of these ideas; a space in which enquiry can be conducted 'beyond the sphere of written discourse' (Goddard, 2007: 120).

'Records are us' (Schoonmaker, 2010). There is an apparent togetherness, a link between those who value the vinyl record and their corporeality. As we age the record ages with us, a constant reminder of our own fragility. It is often ascribed with human characteristics as the record is spoken of in terms of its warmth, its flaws, its softness, its ageing patinas, its smell and so on. The sense of an object's life running in parallel with our own appeals to something within us, beyond just engaging with its functional purpose. Yochim and Biddinger have described a 'persistent alliance between records and anxieties between life and death,' (Yochim and Biddinger, 2008), a conception of this little black disc as somehow transcendent.

As we have mapped out above in the case of Sheena's story, the musical journey is one that is traced, yet untraceable, through the continuous intertwining of lived and mediated experiences dissecting the grooves and troughs of daily life. As we take our collections with us on this journey, 'the vinyl record becomes a palimpsest that has a history of layered marks that you can't erase, incidental scratches become a natural part of the piece, not a mistake but integral to its meaning and composition' (Estep, 2014: 39). As do we, the vinyl record loses a few cells everyday, changing its sounding properties, the roughness of life flattening the sound, dulling the sharpness of its comment, fading out the voice over time, weakness taking hold, the volume dropping, and a softness enveloping the communication. The materiality of the record exposes its 'grain'. The dirt sticks. It sticks to us as it sticks to the record, and is destructive for both in its

accumulation. New sound worlds open up as each day passes; just as the fleshy voice changes with each cigarette, as each coffee, each conversation, song in the shower, party, and kiss destroys us slowly, so it does with the records we keep to remember them by.

There has been a constant adumbration of death throughout the history of recording. Records themselves are the carriers of ghostly voices being spun forth from the illegible grooves. The dead are enlivened through the technology of the phonograph, a library of lost voices captured in vinyl sarcophagi for example. Kittler described the wax cylinder as 'the corpse that speaks' (Kittler, 1986: 83). Technologies that reproduce sound invoke a liminal netherworld, a space inside an in-between embodied space. Reproduction platforms displace the voice, giving the listener access to a disembodied persona emanating from somewhere beyond the realms of possibility, strangely untraceable and certainly untouchable, an uncanny presence pervading the private space of the listener. The vinyl record when unsheathed from its cardboard sleeve seems to act as a black hole or a portal. Notions of loss and absence are palpable in this acousmatic space, yet the listener holds the power of reanimation. The vinyl voodoo doll stabbed by the needle is resurrected time and again, screaming its invocation from the depths of the groove, but in a macabre paradox we kill the very thing that we also love. 'This gouging scoring action of the needle adds a spectre of pain to the process of playing the record, linking phonography to dentistry, carving inscription onto gravestones, vaccination, the art of tattooing, acupuncture, piercings, heroin, murder...' (Toop, 2003: 126).

In these private trysts we commune with our chosen author, we call on them to explain how we feel, how we look, what we think about the world from which we are attempting to escape. For in that one side of playing time, out to the horizon on their sound wave, we have to 'create a king worthy of killing' (Burke, 1998: 26). But as I have shown above, 'you are free to fill your mind with the music itself, or the music with your mind' (Eisenberg, 2005: 204). So writer after writer, performer after performer, is unable to fully extricate us from ourselves, we are at

one with them, singing along, reading the sleeve notes, and muddying up the signal.

Yet the surface of the record, which ‘is kind of taboo ... poses a temptation’ (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 85). It acts as the mechanized embodiment of the siren song, drawing us into hypnotic spiral and affording us a tactile pleasure. It is transformative, and has a tradition of being transformed. So I took up my awl and with the trepidation inherent in the act of destruction, began to cut a new narrative intersecting traditional boundaries of usage.

CHAPTER THREE:

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

‘Cut up the words. Make them make a new world.’ (Gysin, 1999: 67)

‘You Sound Like A Broken Record’ (YSLABR) started out as an exploration of the tensions and paradoxes that exist in the vinyl record as both a symbol of the highly personal, subjective experience, and the mechanized unit of value for the music industry. The work is a practice led interrogation of how this dialectic position is manifest, using the stories attached to vinyl records by their owners as its starting point. Therefore, thinking about the political economy of the record and instantiating through practice the wide---ranging connections, struggle and fractures are at the heart of this work. In the following chapter I will map out the theoretical basis for my inscribed interventions with the donated vinyl records and how the practical work responds to my respondents’ stories. It is the inscription that will be the main focus here rather than the compositional aspects of the work. I engage with the Levi---Strauss conception of the ‘bricoleur’ and draw parallels to my own creative processes. I also employ De Certeau to show how the record becomes a symbol of personal struggle for my respondents. Finally I bring Deleuze and Guattari into the discussion when thinking about the YSLABR project and its relationship to the remix and the idea of assemblage to help us better understand the object, and its diverse ontological resonances.

In Chapter One I sketched out some of the historical uses of the vinyl record in both visual art and art music fields. This was done with the backdrop of Adorno’s theory of standardization, a view that is closely linked to his historical critiques of both the phonograph and the recorded disc. Indeed his model of standardization begins with the disc’s materiality, a reading that he outlined in his two essays, ‘The Curve of the Needle’ originally published in 1927, and ‘On the Form of the Phonograph Record’ from 1934. For Adorno, coupling the form of the technology, its context of use, and the influence of the market compromises music’s

expressive qualities and is also experientially reductive to its listeners. Adorno places great stock on this symbiotic relationship between the disc and music itself, showing how the two are in many ways dependent on one another, or at least have an inviolable relationship. I showed however, in the first chapter, how the market has never been quite as oppressive or restrictive as Adorno's jeremiad predicted in these essays, as recording technologies have always provided the possibility of rupture and misuse. The creative mind has overtly harnessed recording technologies in such ways as to produce them as vibrant, productive and subversive by unlocking their potential ability to produce unique and never before heard sound worlds. But equally everyday users have adapted technologies to suit their own practices, and to carve out their space of struggle within the confines of the industrial discourse. The YSLABR project explores the intersection of these practices.

The idea of pushing audio technologies to their limit in the pursuit of new sounds, and as a corollary expanding their aesthetic value is covered in wonderful detail in Caleb Kelly's book *Cracked Media*. Having not read this book before I started to experiment with vinyl records, I found it extremely interesting that many of the ideas posited by Kelly in his analysis of other artists' 'cracked media' work chimed with my own reasons for making the YSLABR work. For example, as I suggest in Chapter One, Kelly draws on the work of Adorno and Attali, to show how the constructive vandalism which goes along with taking a sounding technology to the edges of its given functionality, can be read in the face of late capitalism and the excesses of the music industry. He explains that 'the flow of production and consumption is disturbed by the productive musical outcomes generated by cracking and breaking media, and second, the fetishistic character of musical consumption is questioned by the abuse of the reified products of the music industry' (Kelly, 2009: 58--59). Kelly's point is that by vandalizing a musical product, what the artist is doing is drawing attention to it as a medium. The Adornian and subsequently Attalian critiques are predicated on the idea that musical technologies are 'a symptom of capitalism' that 'alienate the producer and consumer' (Kelly, 2009: 48). The record separates the experience of musician

and listener so ‘music can sometimes seem elusive compared with the solidity of these ordered and alphabetized commodities’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2013: 47). The musician is making a recording that is removed, by technology, from the physicality of musicianship. The consumer wants the recording, a tangible object in exchange for money. The music then in this scenario becomes a secondary impulse, it is there by proxy, it exists on, or in the object, but the recording is the ultimate goal of the purchase. The artifact of the mediation is always present, making itself available as a totem of the alienated figure of the music. But it is a safe totem, a standard unit, understandable and legitimated by the industry that produces it. The vinyl record, though, has always had a certain ‘otherness’, a mystique which adds a sense of danger to its standard form. Christian Marclay explains how this mysterious surface is creatively attractive in saying, ‘[t]he difference between the presence of the object and the absence of sound is what interests me’ (Marclay, 2014: 26). By taking these objects and wresting them away from a reproductive trajectory that is prescribed and flat, through abuse or destruction, one is able to highlight and expose their frailties and material dynamism, thus bringing them into new life and being. In so doing this work questions and redraws the connections between user and industry, music and material.

In attempting to reinterpret the objects of music, artists are essentially inventing a new sonic language, with the hope of communicating the complexity of our human condition. For example, Herwitz makes the statement that the Cagian project was conceived to ‘clear away the rubble of past music ... to get one’s ears to hear from scratch’ (Herwitz, 1993: 142). What better way of doing this but to destroy the very records of music themselves, a process that Cage would most probably have supported whole---heartedly, given his deep dislike of records and recording, or maybe even to use the rubble itself. In this context a destructive act can be tellingly productive, and hugely powerful, with socially significant ramifications. Destroying something is a display of one’s power over both object and the culture that produced it. It silences and simultaneously places a new

voice into the discourse, a voice that could very well be the sound of the destruction of the old.

In 1916, Hugo Ball walked onto a stage in the 'Zunfthaus' in Zurich and recited a phonetic poem; a diary entry from that night reads, 'the next step is for poetry to discard language as painting has discarded the object, and for similar reasons. Nothing like this has existed before.' (Richter, 1965: 41) The sounds that Ball made were met by 'initial bafflement at this totally new sound', yet later, 'the abstract phonetic poem, which was to find numerous imitators and continuers and to reach its close in French Lettrisme, was born as a new art form' (Richter, 1965: 42---43). As Kahn reminds us, this kind practice also had a political bent as an 'attempt to generate a transcultural appeal within language, similar to the one already rehearsed within ideas of music as a universal communicator' (Kahn, 2001: 48). Sound was being used to question old artistic and social formations. It was also the siren that permitted the use of materials available around us for artistic use. Old barriers were coming down and the sounds of their destruction were trenchant and heuristic; corporeal expression, human in the face of rapid technological development. The role of the avant---gardists is essential to the YSLABR story as a distinct lineage can be traced from Bruitists to the B---Boys stopping for tea with Burroughs along the way. Herwitz remarks that 'history is replete with examples of things that no one seemed to be able to imagine yet which happened, hence were clearly human possibilities' (Herwitz, 1993: 157---8). Those artists pushing sound technology to its limits are trying to manifest the imaginary and bring new possibilities of sound, music, and experience into being.

Repetition and replication are inevitable conditions of recording, yet '[f]or new meaning to be created a crisis or catastrophe must occur, or perhaps an accident, that will fill the elements of chaos into a singular focused meaning. Noise is then filled with all future possibilities.' (Kelly, 2009: 81) This idea of being able to set forth something new by destroying something once forgotten has been posited by William Burroughs. Writing about his 'cut up' method with both magnetic tape and texts, he says 'mix yesterday in with today and hear tomorrow your

future rising out of old recordings' (Burroughs, 2006: 338). For this movement to occur, however, some misuse or malfunction must take place; indeed, even Adorno alludes to this productive potential in 'The Curve of the Needle'. After hearing the phonograph slowing down as its sprung energy dissipated, he writes, '[o]nly when the gramophonic reproduction breaks down are the objects transformed' (Adorno, 1927: 275). And as Cox reminds us, 'perfect replication, we know from biology, would be a recipe for death and extinction. Life and creativity thrive on mutation, variation and divergence.' (Cox, 2010: 167) Mutation in the age of machines relies on bringing the system into focus, to allow the audience to hear or see the noise, to listen to the machine itself, to identify techniques to engage with its agency. Mechanical mutation is malfunction, one that can be brought about through human intervention. Noise is an ever---present material of life, just waiting in the wings to be called to perform, with a new unintelligible translation of a familiar script. It is the complex web of already existing relationships that give way to such opportunities to arise. It is critical to note that such newness is only able to proffer itself in a musical ecology that is constantly in flux, by simultaneously attempting to repeat itself.

Baudrillard suggests that 'the project of a technological society implies putting the very idea of genesis into question and omitting all the origins, received meanings and essences...' (Baudrillard, 2005: 27---28). In other words, with the ever---developing role of technology, the importance of historical notions of human agency becomes undervalued to the point of becoming obsolete. The influence of technology dictates that over time, society values functionality and pragmatism, rather than creativity, adaptability, and naturalness. The ontological certainty of objects could therefore be lost. In fact Baudrillard goes so far as to state that 'the past in its entirety has been pressed into the service of the market' (Baudrillard, 2005: 89). YSLABR is trying instead to press it into the service of creativity. Baudrillard is providing a description of the alienation which commodification engenders on its unsuspecting subjects, as also theorized by Attali and Adorno. The former, for example, makes the claim that 'in mass production the mold has almost no importance or value in itself' (Attali, 1985: 15).

Yet in the act of destruction and vandalism we find new pathways of use that not just reinvent the object to produce new molds, but also incrementally affect the system as a whole. Through recombination, re---appropriation, or ‘cracking’ as Kelly would call it, an essence of humanity has been reinstated to the object, drawing it away from a nexus of industrial associations. As Kelly states, ‘the imagined transparent and passive mediating devices of storage and playback are transformed into generative technologies by practitioners of the crack and break, breaking the linear flow of production’ (Kelly, 2009: 59). By taking different sounding devices to the extremes of their abilities, artists are questioning the validity of arguments which describe media as dead or fixed, and in this process they enliven debates about the nature of our relationship to not only the objects of music but also to the systems that have created and which store them. I would argue this is definitely the case with the vinyl record. Cox sums up this argument rather nicely, saying, ‘like any commodity, a record is what Karl Marx called ‘dead labour’, the congealed residue of human activity. The ordinary commodity disavows or dissimulates this essence, but the phonograph record makes it peculiarly manifest.’ (Cox, 2010: 166) Bartmanski and Woodward take this idea and relate it specifically to the longevity experienced by the vinyl record, saying that ‘we have for a time become detached from the poetics of physical media, as well as their historical importance... cultural meaninglessness was quickly revealed as the flip side to perfect convenience’ (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 5, 20). In the digital age, music could go some way to floating free of its captive object in the form of the transient mp3, yet the acquisition of something to represent these sounds lies very much at the center of how music’s meanings are created. As Middleton states, ‘technology is by its nature reversible’ (Middleton, 1990: 68), but one has to apprehend the technology first before that reversal is made possible.

By crashing the hardware one can question the authority of the objects that they destroy, whilst simultaneously revering them by pushing these objects into new shapes to find their unimagined potentials. Importantly, artists working in this way have recognized and respect the agency of the object and its ability to act

and react in dialogue with the intervention of the artist, who, through a destructive process may have set its sounding potential in motion, but equally may be unable to control the outcomes. This ability of the artist to shift the focus with the process of production was prophetically modeled by Benjamin and here is explained by Middleton, as he summarizes that '[a]n artist's contribution now must be assessed by reference to his positioning within the process of production. Using the methods offered by new technical media, he must become a self-aware participant in the total apparatus of production. He must work towards ... a transformation of the apparatus.' (Middleton, 1990: 66). (There are many examples of how artists have done this over the years, Satie taking the bar lines out of his scores, Grandmaster Flash developing a pre-listen cue on a sound mixer, Joyce doing away with punctuation, Duchamp playing intellectual games with art as in 'Why Not Sneeze Rose Selavy?', Miro's simplification of symbolism, the list goes on...)

There has been a great deal written about digital technology and its potential democratization of production, but it could be argued that personal interventions were already taking place with more 'fixed' analogue media. The concreteness of the record did not preclude its users from realigning its value, personally and culturally. It may well have been that these interventions were covert reactions shared by the few, even enjoyed as solitary victories over that which they perceived was oppressing them. The transformation which Benjamin speaks of could well have occurred in a bedroom, on a street corner, riding the bus, or even at school. It does not have to be produced in the walls of the institution as one resounding flash that subsequently illuminates a whole culture. In YSLABR, by starting with the stories of my respondents, I am looking for the moment when the apparatus starts to show signs of wear, where tiny hairline fractures begin to appear. Weisbard is 'confident that there remains a dash of the erotic in the most casual of record purchases' (Weisbard, 2004: 280). If this is in fact the case, then records have the potential to break the cycle of alienation posited earlier, just in the simple act of acquisition. Talking about and recalling the situations of use of the records that mean the most to someone allow a

deeper fissure to occur, as time and age produce their own damage. YSLABR stands on the edge of this micro---chasm, poised to dive into the valley of the groove to see how its inhabitants have been sustaining their musical landscapes.

The variety of ways in which my respondents have re---inscribed their relationship with the vinyl record is a positive, active pursuit. Indeed, it puts me in mind of Barthes's insight into the pleasure he derives from his reading practices, of which he writes that 'what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again' (Barthes, 1999: 11---12). This is a description of Barthes 'cutting---up' the text through a personal, active, internal dialogue. He is collaging the words on the page, and the pages across the book, in order to open the text up in new directions. He is arguing for a personal relationship to be developed and acknowledged between text and participant, where both are given the time to fulfill the text's inherent heterogeneity. In 1966 Levi---Strauss coined the term 'bricoleur' whilst theorizing the ontology of western scientific thought in comparison with mythical, magical, or oral knowledge passed on between so---called 'uncivilized' communities. He sets up the idea of the bricoleur as being distinct from the engineer, saying that 'the bricoleur is someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 16---17). In this description he hints at something organic about the working practices of the bricoleur. There is a mischievous connotation to the word 'devious', doing something playful and natural, but with an underlying intent to knowingly disrupt. The bricoleur uses any materials he finds from his surroundings, 'the rules of his game are to make do with whatever is at hand' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 17). By taking objects and moving them into new realms of use and existence, 'the signified changes into the signifier and vice versa' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 21), as 'one of the defining features of bricolage' is 'the tension between constraints and possibilities' (Dezeuze, 2008: 33). This tension is produced by the fact that the object will never be able to fully rid itself of its given form, uses, or connotations, and therefore the bricoleur must be able to work without complete 'freedom of maneuver' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 19). As Toop

states, 'phonography is doomed to invoke history at every level' (Toop, 2003: 125), and its cultural entanglements always remain within its fabric no matter how the new use presents itself. Yet constraint equals freedom in this paradigm of activity, and as it brings about a recalculation of the possible and new languages are developed with existing material, the liminal space of the object is opened for exploration. The bricoleur finds the scratch and pries it open to form a fissure; a crack out of which noise can spill, destabilizing syntax, putting the engineered rules into flux, 'switching the ratio of signal to noise' (Kelly, 2009: 8). In YSLABR cutting across the record's groove is like damming a valley, stopping the natural flow of information down this channel, interrupting the signal, pinching the recorded voice in mid-flow, upsetting the rhythm, preventing the player, or the instrument, or the machine from reaching its rightful place down the line, rudely interrupting. The click of the scratch breaks the music's linearity, it becomes an anathema to the once inviolable communion between listener and imagined voice, flipping the subject back into reality, exposing the media, upsetting the illusion of transparency. This break in the system, this transgression of a prescribed model of playback is what the work of the bricoleur describes; it speaks to the agency that is shared by both object and its intervener. Being able to recognize this agency first and foremost is the action of the artist, as for Levi-Strauss, 'he speaks not only with 'things'... but also through the medium of 'things' giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between limited possibilities' (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 21). The bricoleur is aware of the 'moment when the object becomes the Other, when the sardine can looks back, when the mute idol speaks, when the subject experiences the object as uncanny...' (Bennett, 2010: 2).

By partaking in a 'large number of diverse tasks' (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 17) across various media, I suggest that there are distinct commonalities between Levi-Strauss's vision of the bricoleur and the practices which I explore through the YSLABR project. Dezeuze tell us that 'processes of addition, expansion and substitution' are 'characteristic of bricolage' (Dezeuze, 2008: 34). In my 'recordworks' (Thomas: 2013), a new layer or a new audio texture is added to the

existing record in the form of the inscription or etching. This expands the existing text in two distinct ways. Firstly it produces the actual surface of the record itself as a visual interface, one, which could solely be seen aesthetically if desired. Secondly it also adds a new layer of sound to the record, the cracks reorganizing the record's present musical information as described above. The writing / inscription are formally traditional (being written words of the English language), yet enacted on a non---traditional surface, producing a (surface) tension. This collision of the two, redrawing the use value of the record, gives the story written on the record the chance to move beyond just its linguistic signification and enter an aesthetic and sonic mode. It also speaks to ideas of subversion like the sandpaper records of the Dust Breeders, for example, released in 1989 (Dworkin, 2013: 170). The bricoleur, according to Levi---Strauss, 'constructs a material object that is also an object of knowledge' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 22). My adoption of the bricolage method of working attempts to reflect how vinyl records can work as, 'icons and tools rather than purely replaceable semiotic convention. They are indispensable physical interfaces of culture that co---constitute nearly all our meanings.' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 64) The object has a hybridity of affordances that change over its lifetime and create meaning in tacit collaboration with human usage, as Baudrillard notes: '[h]uman beings and objects are indeed bound together in a collusion in which the object takes on a certain density, an emotional value – what might be called a 'presence'' (Baudrillard, 2005: 14). By adapting the things that are around us, in my case the records that have reached me from numerous random pathways, one can start adding to the expressive cache inherent in this already vibrant object, allowing an inner life to be exposed by accepting the notion of 'treating things as interconnected sensory contexts rather than separated inert entities' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 64).

Not only do my inscriptions talk to Levi---Strauss's notion of bricolage, to Kelly's cracking, Benjamin's reconstructed apparatus and Attali and Adorno's critique of the alienation of the listener through commodification, but they also resonate with notions of writing and the groove posited by Adorno in 'On The Form of the

Phonograph Record'. When asked what fascinates him about the record, my respondent Jake from Brighton replies, 'I like the magic and mystique of it as well, the way it is created, the fact that you have this needle being dragged through a gulley, a groove, and it comes out with sound, to me it is just incredible' (Jake 2014). It is a mystical allure that has endured with users for the life of the musical disc. The phonograph record is a 'visible materialization of a previously phenomenal event' (Levin, 1990: 39). As Osborne explains, if we think about the groove 'in semiotic terms, it is the actual representation of the sound, this is not as in linguistics an arbitrary sign, it is sound itself that decides the pattern of the groove' (Osborne, 2012: 7). The groove is a true, ideal representation, one might say altogether natural. Adorno describes the record as 'covered with curves, a delicately scribbled, utterly illegible writing' (Adorno, 1934: 277). This illegibility is a key consideration. It points to the idea of the mystery in music and also in writing. It is all the more intriguing given that when music is able to write its own traces, they are as non---referential as sound itself. And so a mechanism of explanation is employed, '[q]uickly staff writers and producers took over, rehierarchicalizing production, reaestheticizing the form and re---placing consumers in their seats' (Middleton, 1990: 67). Yet on the surface of the record, in the very form of the groove, 'nature seems to be saying something in a language that the human race can no longer understand, that it is has forgotten' (Levin, 1990: 38). For Adorno this brings the inscription back as close to the Ur language as we can find, autonomous, unadulterated expression through language captured in hieroglyphic inscription. 'Where music writes itself there is no writing subject. The record eliminates the subject (and the concomitant economy of intentionality) from the musical inscription... It becomes a citation or, one might say, an allegory of a phenomenal moment...' (Levin, 1990: 41). Rilke also had the notion that the groove is able to summon an analogy of pre---history as 'the author likens the skull's coronal suture to the grooves of a phonograph record and imagines the sound (he wonders if it would be music) that could come from tracing the bony structure' (Grubbs, 2014: 94).

The stories that my respondents tell me about the records that they have chosen to part with also have an allegorical bent. They are family histories, tales of how and how not to live, messages of morality carved into the psyche of each listener and communicated through the grooves of each record in their collections. They show us very clearly how the ‘pure’ groove, maybe the abstraction of the allegory, is compromised by the concrete external noise of context and aggregating tales of specific temporalities. Each record is a construct of a series of struggles occurring in different times, places and spaces overlaid onto the surface of the object, all of whose noises are sucked in, pressed, and trapped by the groovy hieroglyph. Hidden in these grooves are specific human value systems, political leanings, compassion, empathy, fear, anger, and all the experiences of growing up and finding a place in the chaos of the world.

‘I came from a fairly poor area, and suddenly realized that actually... the number of people who would have had records...wouldn’t have been that many... that might have been another differentiator between people who had some money and people who didn’t have anything much at all.’ (Isabel, 2013)

‘Things could have been so much different for me, if I’d stuck to my A-- Levels, I could have had a career in Art and Design, Technology, Fashion Design, which is what I wanted to do. But I didn’t, I sacked it all off, and I went on the hunt for more music, more parties, more friends, more socializing, you know, I could be such a different person... who knows where I’d have been, but I wouldn’t be here, and I wouldn’t have that lot... (points to her record collection)...’ (Deb, 2014)

‘I suppose it was a moral problem, it was really a sin... My parents are not religious, but it’s like a sin. “What are you listening to this music?”’ (Andreas, 2013)

I have included these statements as a snapshot of my respondents’ thoughts on pulling out the record they were going to give me and where the conversation

about that one particular record led them in terms of further reminiscences. All the above quotes show the depth of feeling that can be found in retracing the history of a record. In these statements we hear a fear of the new and popular in Andreas's familial attitudes, a voice calling for social justice and compassion from Isabel, and a realization of the cost of material possessions and the division this can produce: the record as a symbol of the 'Other'. We hear a lament to unfulfilled imaginings of life expectations with Deb, the consolation being the records that surround her, and act as a bittersweet reminder of the consequences of her erstwhile choices. The struggle for Deb is hedonism versus conservatism. Musical listening is political rebellion for Deb, and owning the records is holding the medals of the battle with authority. For her the Blackburn rave scene was sticking it 'up Thatcher's arse big time, yeah' (Deb, 2014). For all my respondents, not just those quoted here, there is a palpable struggle between the personal and the social being, the constructed and the natural self, between the music and the industry which delivers it, and the process of making sense of the non---referential abstract and concrete experiences that make up the constellation of musical listening and ownership. My palimpsestual intervention, my scratch, my introduction of noise, may just, as Eisenberg writes, 'derail the music's progress; but surface noise could turn any piece of music into such a struggle of order against chaos, of the human spirit against the flailing of the blind, but far from mute universe. There are works whose plot line remains... hopelessly intertwined with the subplot of a long, insistent scratch.' (Eisenberg, 2005: 212) I would argue that those works are every work that has been owned and used by someone, somewhere. For the music can never escape us and our social and emotional specificities. With every listen we replay the environment, invoke our memories, and are experientially moved, consciously or not, and it is the record that collects all this meta---data.

Kelly attests that 'cracking media' engages the practitioner in an 'active creative strategy that explicitly draws on a critique of media and mediation' (Kelly, 2009: 29). He likens these artistic procedures to the methodologies expounded by Michel de Certeau in his book 'The Practice of Everyday Life.' From an artistic

perspective there are a number of clear links to Levi---Strauss and the bricoleur, in that de Certeau is thinking about the small, non---engineered, non---institutional acts of subverting the status quo. For de Certeau this could simply be a rhetorical or discursive act as '[t]he thin film of writing becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces' (de Certeau, 1984: xxii). Specifically then, he provides the means of resistance for everyone, he outlines a model with which to negotiate one's own material environments in order to temporarily free oneself from the oppressive world of capital. According to de Certeau, one does not enter into this negotiation chanting overtly political slogans, but rather through the use of 'tactics' and 'making do'. One is able to adopt the dominant language and subtly change it to fit one's own needs, and in so doing attacking the hegemonic platform upon which the language one is using originally stood. This is a notion that chimes with the actions of a bricoleur who 'addresses himself to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavors,' reinventing 'the material means at his disposal' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 19). For de Certeau to assert individuality and at least some semblance of freedom, 'the weak must constantly turn to their own ends forces alien to them' (de Certeau, 1984: xix). We take that which oppresses us, that which alienates us, and we make it our own. In doing so we are able to remodel our lives and ameliorate the process of alienation. De Certeau explains that 'without leaving the place where he has no choice but to live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of plurality and creativity. By an art of being in between, he draws unexpected results from his situation.' (de Certeau, 1984: 30) Michael Bull, studying the iPod, makes the point that musical technologies which are the direct product of the culture industry could well be put to use by that industry to flatten users' responses, using memory and nostalgia as simply a way of exploiting a market. However, he finds that 'this one---dimensional view of the relationship between the consumer and commodity culture obscures the way in which individuals re---appropriate the products of the culture industry in everyday life' (Bull, 2009: 91). The differences between the iPod and the record are obvious and manifold, yet the idea that users can take control of certain aspects of their lives through the use of a technology introduces these opposing technologies with a commonality. Surely it would be

remiss to believe that only with the invention and dissemination of portable or digital playback devices were individuals within a listening public able to tactically shape their own sound worlds.

For example, Andreas, a fifty---three year old sound engineer originally from Italy, shows how the record itself can act as a tactical weapon in the practice of everyday life, against the orthodoxies of tradition. Below Andreas tells the story of how he acquired the record ‘Popcorn’ by La Strana Società that he donated to the YSLABR project:

‘...in my home it was strictly forbidden to listen to pop music. It was absolutely a sin. In my house you could only listen to Mozart, Beethoven, Bach and so on, this was a good thing because actually at seven, eight, I could sing all four symphonies of Brahms, and so on. Anyway, it was really a sin, you couldn’t even know, not to say the name of Beatles, because ‘what are you saying?’ So I got a small AM radio at ten and then I began to discover a real world outside with good music, not Handel, not Bach, but it was good music. Suddenly I discovered ‘Popcorn’. Now ‘Popcorn’ was more a way to demonstrate the new Moog instrument, the new synthesizer instrument, rather than the song itself, but it had success. The first group that recorded ‘Popcorn’ was the group Hot Butter and then many others made covers, in Italy it was made by the group La Strana Società, The Strange Society, and I fell in love with the song. It has some qualities, some contrapuntal qualities, it’s not so bad, it’s very well written, it’s very well played. So at twelve I decided I wanted to have this disc, and so I went to my father and I told him, ‘Pappy, I would like to buy this record’, and it was a disaster. Everybody in the house was suddenly sad, and what are we going to do with this guy? It is incredible they phoned to family friends and they came to our house, and I could listen and they said, ‘Well be patient it’s just a disc, it will not destroy his life.’ A disc, a single disc, it was that. And my mother said, ‘but you have a recorder why don’t you record it?’ (Andreas, 2013)

Eventually his parents did allow him to buy the treasured disc although they ‘did not speak to me for a week’ (Andreas, 2013). This was a price worth paying however because ‘this was the first disc I bought which gave me access to another world.’ Interestingly he describes the record as ‘the key to access the outside world, because otherwise this would not have been possible’ (Andreas, 2013). Similarly to Sheena in the previous chapter the idea of escape from the mundanity of the family is palpable here. This purchase represents a tactical act of subversion in the everyday from the everyday, a way of separating Andreas from the draconian rules of his family environment, for ‘my family was a very sad family, everything was heavy’ (Andreas, 2013). For de Certeau a tactic ‘must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it’s least expected. It is a guileful ruse.’ (de Certeau, 1984: 37) The crack that appeared for Andreas was the gift of an AM radio. I would suggest his parents could not have imagined that he would use it to access this new ‘popular’ world outside of the confines of the family home and traditional ideology. Yet Andreas had found a way to expose this crack by physically manifesting the world that he had heard in the ether through purchasing the record and bringing the offending object into the home. It is extremely important when thinking about the resonances of the vinyl disc and its symbolic power to note that Andreas’s mother was happy for him to have a recording of this music, but not actually own the disc. The disc was actually buying into a stratum of society with which his family did not want to be associated, *La Strana Societe* indeed, because as Andreas explains, pop music ‘was something which could ruin the good society. The good society listen to Mozart, bad boys listen to the Rolling Stones, this was the grounding.’ (Andreas, 2013) De Certeau explains that the gains made by employing these tactics are short lived, ‘producing a sudden flash’ (De Certeau, 1984: 37---38). And for Andreas also, this would seem to have been the case. For now he is working in the field of classical music, as a producer and engineer, and although he describes it as ‘boring’, it would seem that his love of ‘Popcorn’ did not make him obese from its saccharine style, as his parents might have thought. Tellingly he also makes mention of how his education, or one

could say indoctrination in the world of classical music, meant that he could ‘sing all four symphonies of Brahms’ at seven, which is obviously something he is extremely proud of. Here then we see the benefits of having exposure to different styles of music brought about by recordings and having access to them.

Howard, a professional psychologist in his mid---fifties who gave me his ‘Altered Images’ record, is a good example of how the energetic flash that is gained by subversive use of text can quickly dissipate. Howard describes how he ‘morphed from Punk into a bit New Romantic, and then ... I had a Two Tone suit at one point, and then became a Goth without really thinking actually I’m being fed this’ (Howard, 2013). He makes the astute observation that ‘it doesn’t take long for the machine to just chomp them up and feed them back’ (Howard, 2013), ‘them’ being musical styles. Howard describes himself as being ‘rebellious and a bit obnoxious just for the sake of it,’ and how his behaviour ‘didn’t do me any favours in everyday life’ at that time. He finally states that music, the records he was buying, ‘felt like another rod for my back’ (Howard, 2013). For Howard, social behaviour and records go together. Listening to a certain music means acting a certain way, or at least it did when he was younger, it was a lifestyle choice. This becomes problematic when the system that you are railing against is also the one that sustains you. De Certeau uses the example of indigenous South Americans living under Spanish rule, who lived inside the oppressive regime and ‘diverted it without leaving it’, ‘they metaphorised the dominant order: they made it function in a different register’ (de Certeau, 1984: 32). One could say that this is what Andreas does; he uses music, which is an oppressive force in his life, and makes it his, using the record as a symbol of his opposition. Howard, however, is constantly swinging between the brand new and the traces of the old, as styles are moulded by iteration into new and exciting forms where authenticity can be lost in reincarnation. It would seem that as the music changes, so do the attitudes that match taste to belonging. Howard conflates his errant behaviour with listening to certain types of music, and perhaps further to this, he is expressing a frustration at not being able to stick with one style as none of them seems to be able to provide the sense of authentic rebellion that he craves. Yet no genre’s

potency 'lasts for more than a flash, because the world rarely leaves room for uncommon intensity, being in large measure an entropic trash---bin of outworn modes that refuse to die' (Massumi, 2005: iv). As Howard goes on to explain, 'if there's something alternative I tend to be very interested in it, although I don't necessarily find it is as good for me as I thought, like drugs for example, just because they're alternative doesn't mean they're good' (Howard, 2013). Over time, those works that once had the power to speak to our sense of alienation become disarmed, as their uniqueness and by association the listener's individuality too are compromised by commodification. A process of constant hybridisation loses its power to propose the new, for as Barham notes, 'if hybridity is normalised it is no longer celebrated and its cultural edge diminishes; it can only retain its power through denial of its own success' (Barham, 2014: 135). What was once used in a tactical way, to engage with individual authorship and negate centralised authority, is equally tactically put to work by that authority on what Deleuze and Guattari would call the 'plane of organization'. As a consequence new tactics need to be developed to redraw the self within this ever---expanding matrix, and so the struggle continues, and can be equally frustrating and exciting at different points along the way.

Elizabeth donated the record 'Happy Birthday' by Stevie Wonder, and in her story too, we can see the notion of resistance being played out. I also point to the idea of the listener as bricoleur in this analysis. De Certeau thinks about the relationship between reader and text, making the assertion that the reader 'detaches them (texts) from their origin. He combines their fragments and creates something unknown in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings.' (de Certeau, 1984: 169) Elizabeth as a reader takes the text given by Stevie Wonder and splits it, like light being refracted, across the map of her life, from the time when she first encountered it to the present day. She attaches it to different people and reorganizes it according to her current usage. Past uses are never forgotten, however; they are still present, and can be called upon when required to explain the text and give it new meaning in the present. This activity continually re---assesses the closed---ness of

the work. Although she does not practically pull the record apart and re---design it for new uses, as an artist might, she is tactically repositioning the dialogue that she has with it, and in so doing she is in control of it on her own terms. It is interesting that de Certeau says that ‘the text has a meaning only through its readers: it changes along with them’ (de Certeau, 1984: 170), and Osborne makes the claim that ‘because a record ages it feels as though it is alive, and it is loved because it ages as the owner does’ (Osborne, 2012: 178). As Elizabeth herself says, ‘the vinyl has such an emotional connection for me, it’s the story of my Mum, it’s the story of my family’ (Elizabeth, 2014). So in the first incarnation the record takes Elizabeth back to a very specific day, as she recalls, ‘I still remember the Wednesday that my Mum went to buy it.’ As she continues the story we see that the purchase of this record becomes a symbol of something much bigger than just liking the song, it is instead a tactic to engage with lost and future identities, as Elizabeth explains. ‘There must have been loads of boys and teenagers there, and my Mum, this African buying the record, and you know...it was her way of getting a new identity in this country ... it was escapism for her and it became escapism for the family, and it was one of those things as well that we had a lot of difficult times later on as a family, extremely difficult times, but having this was the song that we played on everyone’s birthdays’ (Elizabeth, 2014). Just in this opening recollection the record is splintered into fragments. It is simultaneously pulling together and separating, finding a new identity but also being used as means of escape. The record is used as a tool to maintain familial and racial identity in the face of a an unwelcoming new world: ‘My Mum bought this when on the one hand we were financially free, but on the other hand she was new to this country as an immigrant, and she was quite lonely.’ Elizabeth goes on to tell me that ‘later my Dad lost his business, we lost the house, we were homeless for several years but the one thing she kept was still a few of these vinyls, keeping that Stevie Wonder so even when we were in the bedsit she still played Stevie Wonder’ (Elizabeth, 2014). Elizabeth’s use of the word ‘even’ is telling here, the record is therefore so important to the family that it is maintained through the worst circumstances that the family was having to endure. The record, in this instance, is about regaining control of the familial space; it is a way of

proclaiming normalcy in a situation where control is lost. If the record had previously been used to build a family identity around it, then here as that lived reality is in flux, the record is used as a mnemonic of what that once was. The song, embodied by the record, also takes Elizabeth back to a night of celebration with a group of friends including a close friend Yvonne, where she watched Stevie Wonder playing a gig in Hyde Park in London. She explains that ‘it was my birthday actually the next day, on the Sunday, and so at about five to twelve Stevie Wonder sings ‘Happy Birthday’ which was, well obviously such an amazing memory, because soon after that, I guess, maybe a year after that, Yvonne was diagnosed with cancer and a year after that she passed away’ (Elizabeth, 2014). This is a terribly tragic story that forms another layer of emotional and personal connection to this record. We can see how this record and the music shared on it are an assemblage of times, places, people, and experiences, that are aggregated over time and find a site of coalescence in the material of the black plastic discs. These experience are imbricated and mutually contingent, forming the whole experience of the music for Elizabeth and importantly her family. There is mutual interference between the many planes of musical experience and the object, which extend this record beyond just being a musical carrier. Levi---Strauss states that ‘the bricoleur may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it’ (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 21). Although at first glance, placing myself in the role of bricoleur may seem to be at odds with Barthes’s killing of the author that I detailed in the previous chapter, I would argue that it is not just me who is the bricoleur. As shown above, the record is the site for a multiple authors to come together and continue to rewrite the document. The record then is more like an assemblage of texts, the palimpsest, labile and growing ever more complex.

For Deleuze and Guttari, the idea of an assemblage has as its starting point the rhizome, and as they explain here, ‘there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines.’ (Deleuze and Guttari, 2005: 8). A ‘rhizome’ describes a horizontally growing underground stem. It is decentred, constantly intra---weaving, laterally combining a series of

connections. Positioning the subject and the object in a realm of multiplicities produces connections that subsequently form assemblages. The assemblage brings together the varied existences in which the subject and object relationship is formed, and by combining these disparate actors we can better appreciate the agency of the object as Bennett describes: ‘an assemblage owes its agentic capacity to the vitality of the materials that constitute it’ (Bennett, 2010: 34). Once the vitality of the material within a ‘rhizome has reached its nadir of intensity a “plateau” is reached, as this intensity is ‘not automatically dissipated in a climax’ (Massumi, 2005: iv). The intensity of the connections within the rhizome causes an ‘afterimage’ or a trace to be left, and this ‘can be reactivated or injected onto other activities, creating a fabric of intensive states between which any number of connecting routes could exist’ (Massumi, 2005: iv). Through the prism of the assemblage model a fuller, richer, and dynamic set of relationships opens up, one in which adaptation is foregrounded. Deleuze and Guattari’s position is born out of their conception of ‘Nomad thought’ that is anti-philosophical and ‘replaces restrictive analogy with a conductivity that knows no bounds’ (Massumi, 2005: xii). Their project is attempting to break thought out of the constraints of gridded state space into a nomadic space that is smooth and ‘rides difference’ (Massumi, 2005: xii). In YSLABR each record could be considered a plateau. It is the symbol of a wide variety of conjoined trajectories, macro and micro enmeshments collating on and just beneath its surface resulting in a dynamic and vibrant thing. It is a collection of multiplicities that are continually being reterritorialised, or re-coded with a different set of functions, adapting to its given context, contingent to the owner’s position. Between us (my respondents and me) we crack the vinyl, resisting the homogenizing force of the culture industry, in a ‘zone of intensive continuity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2005: 22).

The starting point for all of the records I have produced is the stories of my respondents and their relationship with the discs they have donated, as detailed above in the stories of Andreas, Howard, and Elizabeth, which is the core material for this work. Not only do these narratives inform the compositional

elements of the work (which I will describe in more detail in the next chapter), they become the scratch itself. Moving across different forms, they are one of the 'heterogeneous objects of which' my 'treasury is composed' (Levi---Strauss, 1966: 19). Here I am placed at the juncture of participant and observer. During the time spent collecting the interview data, and later during transcription and then creative intervention, my respondent, the record, and I inhabit the text together, and are in energetic dialogue as the new text is being produced. Maybe it is in this lacuna, in this 'gap of varying proportions opened up by the use' that we 'make of them' (de Certeau, 1984: 32), in which the text is illuminated by the intervention. By sharing music, object, narrative, and practice, we have in some very small, but arguably significant way, remade the apparatus or 'metaphorised the dominant order... made it function in another register' (de Certeau, 1984: 32).

Therefore my respondents are also playing a creative role, becoming one of multiple authors. Employing personal tactics to make the text theirs in the first place, as is the case with Andreas's example above, and then being able to share that with me subsequently, mean that we become joint voices in the work. De Certeau notes that the tactician 'does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise' (de Certeau, 1984: 174). Perhaps through the dialogue introduced by the process of preparing these records, some of what is lost or at least hidden for each respondent can be re---found by re---telling these stories. There is no content in this project without the interview, and there is no interview without the record. There is no record without the industry, no industry without consumer. There are no creative interventions without previous creative interventions, and these would not have been possible without the physical affordances that the record's materiality provides. Authors coalesce around the object and consequently one another, and are interlocutors with each other and the object itself. As the so---called artist, I stand as the participant observer, catalyzing a conversation and facilitating its direction, helping to develop iterations of a language through which these many voices can communicate, instigating new sets of instruments to sound a unique commentary of the object and to harness

the objects' own unique voice. In describing the works of the bricoleur, Levi-Strauss says that '[t]hey are man made and what is more made by hand. They are therefore not just a projection or passive homologues of the object; they constitute a real experiment with it' (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 24). I would argue that the 'recordworks' (Thomas: 2013) from YSLABR would fit happily into this portrayal.

The work presented here is also an important element in the final sound pieces that have been created out of each record for the YSLABR project. In the next chapter I focus more on the practical methods I have employed in the creation of the YSLABR works. A more specific discussion of hip-hop sampling techniques, indeterminacy, and repetition is again linked to the stories of the projects' vinyl donors and collaborative authors.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CRUSHED GROOVES, CHOPPED CONVERSATIONS & CORRUPT COMPOSITIONS

'I was under the thrall of a rhizomatic romance...' (Kahn, 2011: 96)

From approximately 1993 – 2000, the question I uttered more than any other was, 'What the f@*k is that?' Being around other DJs and record collectors I would be introduced to some new record on a daily, if not hourly basis. The majority of this musical material could be described as 'break beats' or 'breaks'. We were constantly trying to search out what records had been sampled to create the hip-hop tracks we were listening to at the time, as well as buying new hip-hop records that subsequently added to the list of 'breaks' that we endeavored to find. We were tracing the genealogy of hip-hop itself, and also those records that provided the material for its genesis.

As my friends were aspiring producers, we were also trying to find new records that might contain that one little section of something which could be 'flipped' or sampled for a new song. The truth is, however, that no matter how long I spent in charity shops and record shops, bent double under trestle tables at car boot sales or looking on the internet, I never seemed to have a great deal of luck. I got a few bits and pieces that were of interest, but nothing really outstanding. I was no master 'crate-digger'. For one, I had a bad memory for names and titles; for two, I never had enough money on me at the crucial moment and I never just seemed to be in the right place at the right time. The sound works I have made in YSLABR are an attempt to succeed where historically I had failed.

Just like the outsider artist, Minging Mike, who 'created a vast and fantastic world of his own' (Hadar, 2004: 117) by hand drawing thousands of record sleeves of imagined bands, songs, and albums, or those DJs who 'developed stealth strategies; buying up all available copies of a new record... retitling of a record, or

scratching off the labels (or sticking on fake ones)' (Sullivan, 2014: 17) to try and outdo their competitors, I have also tried to create a unique musical world by extending the techniques of disguise. The fourteen records that make up the YSLABR work are now true originals, the inscriptions my method of ensuring that I have produced that sought---after 'Holy Grail'; the unique record, the rarest of the rare.

Hip---hop provides an unwritten rulebook for compositional practices, a self---policing ethics that to a greater or lesser extent governs its aesthetic production. Schloss writes, '...sample---based hip---hop preserves both its community and itself through the Zen---like paradox it embodies; the assimilation of radical new material is the core practice around which a deeply conservative tradition has been built. To rest on one's laurels --- to be traditional in a superficial way --- is to violate the tradition; to be purist is to preserve the value of the new, the unexpected, and the bizarre' (Schloss, 2004: 197). As records are respected as the cornerstone of hip---hop culture, the record and the obscure and unusual 'break', when used in the 'right' way, can open up the door to new formulations and still retain hip---hop authenticity. In all of the YSLABR works the spectre of hip---hop is omnipresent. If it is not immediately recognizable in some of the pieces, then it is most definitely present in the process of creating each work; as Roots Manuva raps on the track 'Witness', 'duppy took a hold of my hand as I was writing' (Smith, 2001). My experience of hip---hop was my ghostwriter, providing an underlying aesthetic sensibility that was sometimes in tension with and sometimes in symbiosis with the pieces I was making, and the stories my respondents relayed. Below I will present three of the pieces that express this relationship with the greatest clarity.

The YSLABR track 'Tru Thoughts' attempts to capture a DJ's art in just three minutes. It is made up of nine individual sections, all written in the same tempo and with some of the sampled sounds recurring throughout but in different combinations. The track starts with the recorded playing of the vandalized record that then leads into the opening introductory beat. I decided to include the

recording of this etching as a way of allowing the audience the opportunity to see if they could later identify any of the samples that they would subsequently hear in the rest of the track. The question of what is sampled in hip-hop is important for a track to lay claim to that slippery notion of “authenticity”. Although YSLABR does not try to make this claim to the hip-hop community, as the work has been conceived to work through conventions and stray into different territory, the pressure of such conceptions can’t be ignored. Maybe the most valuable point to make here is by Schloss, who says that there is value in ‘the ability to make an aesthetically pleasing beat out of displeasing samples’ (Schloss, 2004: 149), and I had many displeasing samples, when judged from a hip-hop perspective.

The rest of ‘Tru Thoughts’ moves through eight different beats that use samples from the vandalized record in a variety of combinations. All the sections are a similar length and transitions between them have been created to be smooth and flawless, to mirror the work of a skillful DJ moving between their choice of records during a set. The track has been shaped to respond to Jonathan aka ‘Diesler’s’ dedication to the dance floor through his life as a DJ and producer. He donated a compilation of what could be described as ‘Nu-Jazz’ tracks that, as Jonathan points out, ‘is a really limp and horrible term’ to describe an important development in the dance music of the early 2000’s (Jonathan: 2014). The record is ‘When Shapes Join Together 2’ and was released in 2002 to showcase the range of artists who were producing for the Bristol-based label Tru Thoughts. One track in particular caught the young Jonathan’s attention and really epitomizes the kind of music that the Tru Thoughts label had made their own. The track was ‘a remix by a guy called Carl Faure, of Quantic’s, ‘Life in the Rain’ (Jonathan, 2014). On hearing this track, Jonathan decided that he had to get in touch with Carl Faure and tell him how good the remix was and what an impact it had on Jonathan’s musical imagination. The track ignited a creative spark in Jonathan that Carl ‘couldn’t have imagined, you know, that from a compilation, that I would have picked that one out and been like I’ve got to make music like this’. Jonathan then started making tracks ‘that same year, the year this came out in 2002, and that was the same year I sent the demo to Tru Thoughts, and I just

targeted them, almost like they were the only label I wanted to be on ... all I know is that I bought their compilation, I love this compilation, and I want to be part of the next compilation, and I was part of one of their compilations, the one that came out, I sent it to them in 2002 and it came out in 2003... and that for me was like fantastic, because I'd become part of, not the same series but the series that they were doing at that point, so that was, that was, well you know, an achievement.' (Jonathan, 2014)

With this story as a backdrop, 'Tru Thoughts' is built around a series of hip---hop template beats that have been chosen to cover a variety of styles within the genre. For example the first beat has as its basis the 'wonky hip---hop' style that was developed by artists such as Flying Lotus and Ras G. Here the traditional, very rigid, quantized, maybe even digital sounding hip---hop beat is allowed to roam a little more freely from its grid. Some of the rhythmic accents, in both the beat and the samples, have been deliberately placed out of time to give the feeling of a staccato syncopation between the notes of the beats and the samples themselves. In addition, the samples themselves are chopped into small, quite irregular pieces, and randomly thrown back onto the timeline in different orders. This is done repeatedly until some kind of melodic combination is found. I then copy this across a couple of bars, subsequently reworking this by changing timings and sometimes effects on each piece to maintain the overall melodic aesthetic, but making each bar its own original work. Working in this way is a response to the criticism of some dance music forms that rely heavily on loops and drum machines and can consequently make the music sound static, clinical, and lifeless. The idea here is that one could take and loop any individual bar of any of the YSLABR tracks and it should give you something completely new. They are designed as individual units that configure to make up the whole.

In the second section of 'Tru Thoughts' I was trying to program drums to emulate some elements of liveness. This was inspired by the work of 'Luke Vibert', 'Paul White', and 'Squarepusher', who are able to make a drum machine sound like Max Roach (well to some extent at least). I was lucky with the 'Tru Thoughts'

record because the playing of the palimpsest provided me with some really clean drum sounds, and in fact it was these sounds that were an important element for the DJ set idea. In this section then the drums are playing lots of fills and triplets, and I have attempted to fill the spaces between samples with a call and response style exchange between kick drum and snare. The next two sections are based on a classic 'New York Boom---Bap' style of hip---hop, the first based on the mid 1990's work of DJ Premiere and the second on a J---Dilla beat, which isn't strictly New York, but takes on the same aesthetic. For the DJ Premiere---inspired beat, I have borrowed his technique of using a very simple two---note bass line, where one note plays simultaneously with the kick drum on the 'down beat', and then plays in a sixteenth pattern again on beat one of the subsequent bar. We then move onto a more complex rhythmic section with what I guess is a guitar sample that loops and underpins the section. In this section the drums are less fluid, and have more pauses and stops between the movement of the melody and the drums. In order to make a smooth transition between the two sections, I used two different parts of the same guitar sample to maintain a sonic coherence. Then we have what could be described as the breakdown in the track as I introduce a different rhythm that has been constructed from many different conga samples, all stitched together to give the track extra movement, swing, and dynamic. In their first iteration, the drums were based on a complex section from an intricate electronica track by 'Autechre'. But I significantly veered away from this to create a simpler pattern in the final version of 'Tru Thoughts', as the conga samples were providing enough variation, and the guitar sample was holding the space in the center of the stereo field. This meant the drums just need to stabilize this section, rather than have too much of their own to say. As with any DJ set the energy needs to ebb and flow, producing tensions and release. This section has been written as a moment of quiet providing the platform for the introduction of new elements.

'Tru Thoughts' is also one of the YSLABR tracks where I have added a vocal sample from my respondent's interview to the work. In this instance it is a cut up of Jonathan saying, 'I just started playing around with sounds,' and 'it can be

anything' (Jonathan, 2014). In this part of the track I used some trumpet samples that I had discovered on the playback of the record as the instrumental backing to Jonathan's voice. The reason I chose to use this particular instrumentation here is because Jonathan loves a good horn line in his own music; tracks like '900 Degrees' are a good example of this, and also the Carl Faure track that became his inspiration, which has a chopped trumpet line running through it. I thought the quote was telling in a variety of ways, especially with reference to my work in this project, but also to wider debates in sound art and art music. As I heard Jonathan saying 'it can be anything', I found myself thinking, 'Really? I'm not so sure it can be!' This put me in mind of Jonathan's own attitude to music that is grounded by adherence to certain generic codes and conventions. For example he says, '...these are supposed to be disposable, fun, happy times, party tracks, and you're sat there ... listening going, 'How have they made this so funky? What's the perfect formula for funky?' You know ... like a professor of the funk or researchers, like with that track it's the same.' (Jonathan, 2014) The comment I sampled struck as me being such an excellent summation of a central question of the YSLABR project --- the idea of sound, music, material, and meaning --- that I felt it would have been remiss of me not to include it in some way. The actual sample has been processed using compression, reverb, some echo, and a technique where I take one sample, copy it over two digital tracks of audio, and use a hard pan to send one to the left speaker and one to the right speaker. I then use a digital delay on one of the channels, which is set to delay that signal between 5 and 20 milliseconds. This creates the illusion of a very wide stereo field. It is a technique that is used often throughout the YSLABR work, but in this particular case I wanted to create the impression of the voice visiting the listener from a space beyond the track. It gives the impression that Jonathan's voice is part of, yet separate from, that which is going on around it. The voice is chopped into tiny fragments towards the end of this section and works as a rhythmic counterpoint to the trumpet samples, but through the processing I wanted to ensure its overall sonic separation from the musical sounds in the track.

At the end of the track I have used a technique of processing which takes one sample and repeats it through a series of pitch adjusters, giving the illusion of the sound slowing down. This was done simply to replicate the power being turned off on a DJ turntable, which has become a standard technique to end a DJ mix. The list of influences in 'Tru Thoughts' is long and I don't have the space to explain each one in its entirety. However, I have attempted to take techniques and form from many of the most prevalent styles of dance music over the last thirty years or so and incorporate them in some way into the final piece. This is the sonic equivalent of dipping into a DJ's record bag and playing just a few seconds of the first ten records that you find.

The hip---hop aesthetic in the track 'Badgewearer' was realized by a little bit of theft on my part, a bit of musical borrowing. This is a technique well used by many a composer down the years. Charles Ives is a famous example, as is the inimitable Erik Satie. In his 'Pieces Froide' written in 1897, he 'takes as his source material the well---known Northumbrian folk tune "The Kneel Row". In lieu of simply quoting the jaunty melody, Satie adopted its easily recognized rhythms, then recomposed and reharmonised the melody as if to conceal the source.'

(Davies, 2007: 62---63)

In 'Badgewearer', the rhythmic backbone of the whole work is based on the drum pattern from the 1987 track "Top Billin" by Audio Two. This song placed at number one in 'Hip---Hop's Greatest Singles by Year' for 1987 in Ego Trip's Book of Rap Lists (Jenkins et al, 1999: 321). I absolve my guilt for my thieving by placing the blame with my respondents, as their stories provided my compositional motives and the conceptual intentions of each piece. For example, I chose this particular track as my source template because my respondent Tony was a huge punk fan during the early 80's, a choice that had caused his Dad, an opera fan, a few sleepless nights. He recounts that his Dad 'was pretty Draconian you know, he went through the records and there was a couple of things that had dodgy covers and he just wasn't happy with me listening to it', but he goes on to note that 'it wasn't banned, it was kind of vetted' (Tony, 2015). He then tells me that

his son is listening to a French hip---hop artist called 'Black M', and 'it was just horrific stuff, it was like I cannot, I just don't want it in my house for a start' (Tony, 2015). Tony clarifies that the misogynistic lyrical content was the thing that he was averse to, adding that his attitude to it is 'more of a parenting question, than a music thing'. He goes on to say that because of his own involvement in punk, 'you know 'pretty vacant' and all this kind of nihilism, I can understand the concern' (Tony, 2015) from his own parents at the time. So, in my role as participant observer, and to maintain the dialogic relationship of the material in this work, I started to think about my own experiences of the music I listened to that annoyed my parents. 'Top Billin' by Audio Two was right up there, alongside another family favorite 'Straight Out the Jungle' by, as my Dad used to call them, 'The Jungle Buggers', or for purposes of accuracy 'The Jungle Brothers'.

One could say that the form of 'Top Billin' makes it a difficult listening experience for those not versed in the sonic language of hip---hop. The song is quite simply a repeated beat with a rapper over the top, and echoed vocal samples chanting the phrase 'Go Brooklyn!' playing throughout: no melody allowed. There are striking parallels with Adam's 'Klaus Wunderlich' record, another song connected to the YSLABR album, that I will explore later in this chapter. The factor that made 'Top Billin' a standout work in the 1987 hip---hop landscape was the structure of the beat. Instead of having an accented snare drum on the second and fourth beat, which was the convention with most hip---hop at the time, 'Top Billin' plays a kick drum on one, two, and three, then lets the snare hit on four. In the next bar it plays a series of triplets and pauses with the kicks across beats one to three, and again the snare drum accents beat four. At the opening of the track there is no hi---hat, so the work is made of a very sparse, funky, loquacious, and memorable beat which is the complete antithesis to the popular music's melodic tradition.

As I had decided on a rhythmic template derived from 'Top Billin', it struck me that Tony's own musical past also appeared to have resonances with the structure

of the work. The record that Tony had given me was the first album from his own band Badgewearer, who had some critical acclaim during the early 1990s; 'it was our press that made us stand out from the other bands. Cause we'd kind of been recognized by others, by the music press...' (Tony, 2015). In describing Badgewearer's music, Tony says, 'we wanted to be, it's an old cliché you know, we wanted to be original' (Tony, 2015). Further he is very specific about how they attempted to do this, 'We wanted changes on three and five rather than four, no middle eight, we didn't want choruses, basically we wanted... to write songs in a different way so that the audience didn't know what to expect' (Tony, 2015). But as Tony points out, 'the thing with that is, you can only go so far before it becomes totally contrived I think...' (Tony, 2015).

With this in mind as I began to structure 'Badgewearer', I attempted to come to a balance between changes that somehow made sense, sonically at least, if not musically, but were unexpected and challenged the pounding repetition of the Audio Two inspired beat. Within the writing of the beat itself, however, I have attempted to make micro changes in every bar, which is attempting to replicate the human inaccuracies that would be heard in someone playing their instrument live. Notes have been pushed just out of time by milliseconds, either before or after the beat, to give this effect of liveness, although the huge amounts of processing in the sounds around the beat directly signal the unreality of the whole composition. This is especially true of the use of the vocal samples I extracted, which jump in pitch, are cut away from their original intention, and fragmented in time across different sections of the final track and in the very time frame of the enunciations themselves.

In 'Badgewearer' I am also invoking a tension between this new use of the records, the memory of the record, and the record itself. I use Tony's voice to narrate this relationship towards the end of the track. He recounts actually having a vinyl record of his own music for the first time saying, 'From Leo Sayer to that moment was fucking significant. You know to have it in my hand, you know to think I'm now contributing to the library of stuff that's out there ... so

when it arrived, well that was a great feeling.’ Tony’s voice is introduced after three and half minutes of the ‘Badgewearer’ track, which has by this point gone through a number of different changes. Just before Tony starts to speak, we hear a loop that occurred whilst the record had been playing as it got trapped between engraved words.

At the start of the loop the singer screams ‘Why?’, so this word occurs at the start of every repetition. The loop then fades away behind what sounds like a synth pad, but is in fact just a very short fragment of a guitar note that has been passed through a reverb unit that pulls out the inherent frequencies and magically creates tones. I used this same sound earlier in the work to bring about a sense of calm and balance to a group of quite hard and unforgiving sounds. I wanted this ‘synth’ sound to lift us away from the screaming invocation from the previous phrase and introduce us to our protagonist. Tony’s voice is itself abstracted as I had recorded it directly from the phone during our conversation. This high pass of the telephone receiver gives the voice an otherworldly quality and could be a signifier of distance in and of itself. This is added to by an extra reverb and some further compression foregrounding the voice into the center of the stereo field, drawing our attention away from the music. Due to the distortion in this recording, it is at times difficult to hear exactly what Tony says; however, this can add to, rather than diminish, the overall communicative potential of the track. As Beirens notes, cutting and manipulating speech brings about ‘more direct access to the expressive content, transmitted by the voice, but hidden by the semantic system of the words’ (Beirens, 2014: 221). In order to segue back to the music and maintain the idea of the rhizomatic development of these pieces, I used an echo chamber on Tony’s voice saying ‘feeling’, which is then matched by an echoed and delayed drum fill. These echoes morph into one another as both music and voice have equal opportunity and worth in meaning creation, as is the leitmotif for all the stages of the YSLABR work.

As the track ends we hear Tony’s voice again saying ‘but the feeling evaporated as soon as I put it on because the sound was terrible...’ (Tony: 2015). The word

‘terrible’ echoes off into the distance, it disappears into a space where we can’t follow, we are left to contemplate the statement without ever being either literally or emotionally close to it, as he and his frustration drifts away from us on the wave of the echo, out across an abyss. The discontent in Tony’s voice is palpable, and I wanted to include this not only to bring a loose resolution to the track, but also to provide a sense of ambiguity as to which record he was talking about. For the listener could assume that he is referring to the track of which he is part, and in this assumption in some ways they would be right. This injection of ambiguity plays with the combinatory authorship that is also at the heart of the YSLABR work.

I also wanted to use Tony’s quote to give an extra layer of emotional synergy between the elements of this piece. Luc Ferrari states that ‘after being processed in the studio, a conversation with someone is not recognizable as discourse, yet it retains its discursive value ... the feeling that can transpire from a word trembling faintly in the voice: to me all that carries meaning’ (Caux, 2002: 48). Here we can hear the disappointment and frustration that Tony felt when first playing his record. This emotional content is imbued with new significance as he is surrounded by the sounds of that very record expressed in significantly new textures and shapes.

In terms of the specific content of the stories I was told, it is Adam’s that has the most direct resonances with sampling culture and hip---hop. Adam gave me a copy of ‘The Hit World of Klaus Wunderlich’, a record he first ‘purchased for the Sugar Me/Standing in the Road break, which was one of the first records that I realized you could buy in a charity shop and it had amazing drums on it’ (Adam, 2015). Being a knowledgeable hip---hop fan and professional DJ, Adam was especially inspired by other DJs who were ‘just taking two copies, of like David Bowie records, things that probably aren’t particularly hard to find, and like flipping ‘em in a bit of a different way’, he says, ‘I just love that sort of thing’ (Adam, 2015).

The break featured on the Klaus Wunderlich album is classic sampling fodder. It has a four bar section towards the middle of the song, placed as a marker to introduce a new section of the track. At this point just the drums are playing unaccompanied, in what could be considered to be a hip-hop style (kick, kick, snare, kick, ki, kick snare, with the hi hat playing sixteenth notes, and a tambourine adding accents on the downbeats) all this at a distinctly hip-hop tempo of ninety-something beats per minute. The drums are wonderfully recorded with crisp snapping snares, deep resonant bass drums, and hi-hats that tick away sharply making the beat chug along with an easy, groovy swing. Adam describes this break as ‘just heavy drums, just one of those that when you hear them you know, someone has to have had those. You couldn’t believe it if they hadn’t’ (Adam, 2015). And a range of producers have used them, in fact a cursory search on the website www.whosampled.com, an online repository of sampled tracks and their progeny, reveals five tracks by both US and UK hip-hop producers that have used parts of Klaus’s original. However, one track in particular, ‘Emcees Smoke Crack Remix’ by the independent hip-hop artist Edan, has particular significance to Adam’s relationship to this record. Interestingly the fact that this particular use of the break does not feature on www.whosampled.com speaks to Adam’s connoisseurship of his field.

Adam explains: ‘Combine, that used to be in Leeds, that used to have a little shop up there, a Bristol guy, he’d given Edan a copy of it when he came at ... Drum Major ... I don’t know how true that is or not, but then they used it on that ‘Emcees Smoke Crack Remix’. So I don’t know if that’s a Leeds beat-digger folktale, or there’s any truth to it whatsoever.’ (Adam, 2015) I would argue that the different elements of the story have significant points of identification for him, and as a result Adam became a little obsessive over this particular break. As a DJ playing around Leeds and Manchester at that point, he was aware of or acquainted with the people involved in the story he tells. He also, as I quoted above, loved the idea of taking everyday records, or at least things that you can find relatively easily, and making something new out of them. It would seem then that his personal connection to a beat-diggers’ folktale, and the fact that this

record somewhat embodies the epitome of the crate---diggers' art, the tradition of finding the obscure and unsung, but ultimately useful, in the most unexpected of places, led Adam to owning multiple copies of 'The Hit World of Klaus Wunderlich', numbering 'seventeen at the moment' (Adam, 2015).

The obvious next question to ask when someone tells you that they have collected seventeen copies of the same record is, why? 'I think I bought two copies to have doubles of it, then saw a third for fifty pence, and thought, oh, I'll have another of those in case I massively cue burn one of them to bits, and then saw a fourth one, and thought, well you could have four on a wall, that'd look quite nice, so I got four of them. Then I don't know, saw another one ... and thought if I get five then I could have three by three and make it nine on the wall, and then it goes on and on ... now I'm at seventeen' (Adam, 2015). I'm sure Adam won't mind me telling you that none of them made it onto the wall, and I'm not sure if that really was the motivation behind buying so many. Later in the interview Adam divulges that he has three copies of another record which he bought, even though 'I didn't need it but I just thought, I don't want anyone else to have that and start playing it because I just loved it so much' (Adam: 2015). Here we see clearly the similarities between this attitude and the ideas of deception and subterfuge that the early DJs were adopting to *their* records. The idea of competition building community is explored by Schloss and also by Bartmanski and Woodward who believe that digging for records plays an important archeological and social role, specifically in dance music cultures. They note that all the hard work and investment of time in the digging process is worthwhile because 'occasionally a gem or forgotten classic will be unearthed, sometimes under completely unexpected circumstances. Such situations serve as a reminder that the world always holds more than meets the eye.' (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015: 43) Belk mirrors this position as he posits that '[a]lthough the locus may have changed, the need for something that is transcendent, numinous or magical in our lives remains ... the non---use of most collectibles is another indicant of their extra---utilitarian status' (Belk, 1995: 94). Even though Adam tries to give these records a purpose, saying they were bought to go on his

wall, the reality could be closer to the idea that they represent something of a signifier of his abilities as a crate digger, as symbols of his attachment, investment, and success in this field of endeavor.

Throughout all the YSLABR work, I have attempted to identify a musical convention somehow linked to the story of my respondent and create something that could be taken as my rejoinder in this multifaceted conversation between respondent, record, all these manifold associations, and myself. Therefore the first sound you hear in my rendering of the Klaus Wunderlich record is a section from the recording of my interview with Adam. At this point he is playing me the record, and we are listening to the bars leading up to the break. At the moment the break is supposed to play, I have omitted it from the recording and spliced the listener back into the track at the point where the break ends and the rest of the track begins to play once again. I omitted the 'break' simply because the other tracks that I had listened to which had sampled this Klaus Wunderlich record had focused solely on this very part, so I decided to do the exact opposite, as a deliberate opposition to some of the techniques most commonly used in this paradigm of music making practice.

With 'Klaus Wunderlich' I had a limited number of sounds to work with from the outset, because when I played the record back in order to record it to sample from, the needle skipped and skittered its way across the surface in just a minute and a half. This meant that I had rendered very little material that could be snipped away between the sounds of chaotic damage that comes crushing in across the frequency ranges as these palimpsests are translated into sound. On playing side two of Klaus I did get some more workable material. Even though the record skated along for the most part, as it reached the final track it settled down into a groove, and began to play a series of loops. Some of these loops became the basis for the final piece, together with some smaller fragments of horn, drum, and organ samples.

Adam recounts that the mid---1990's is 'still my golden age of hip---hop I think, you know sort of like '94 through to '98 or something, that was when I was most into it' (Adam: 2015). Many of the sounds that I had harvested from the Klaus record put me in mind of this period too. Especially resonant were the 'funky and filtered' (Ferguson: 2014, 29) bass lines of the producer Pete Rock, whose creative nadir was also in this period. Pete Rock's use of a low pass filter to produce a deep and resonant bass line is the stuff of legend amongst hip---hop fans. It was this sound that provided the starting point for the whole track. Because the samples themselves were so reminiscent of this sound in the first place, I didn't have to do a massive amount of processing; all that was required was to clarify the direction of each sample and to ensure that they would speak to one another nicely. I use the word 'nicely' advisedly because I wanted 'Klaus Wunderlich' to still have the qualities of the easy listening idiom from which it had come. Due to the process engaged with in YSLABR, the sonic material can be harsh and dissonant. For some of the works such as 'Bowie', 'Lil Louis', moments in 'Hugo Strasser' and 'Stevie Wonder', I have embraced this aesthetic fully, as it crystallized the narratives driving these work. For Klaus and Adam though, everything was much less dramatic and fraught, our conversation was full of laughter and jocular anecdotes, and I felt that the final piece should attempt to reflect this state of calm easiness. Moving away from a minimalist hip---hop aesthetic that focused on rhythm, drums, and voice, I embraced a minimalism too, but one that focused on space, melody, and slowness. The feeling of warmth in this track is also enhanced by the fuzziness of the final samples from both the physical and digital processing. The focus on the bass frequencies here also gives the impression of the track somehow enveloping the listener. In fact Adam noted that the final track 'sounds like how I imagine a baby to hear music in the womb' (Adam: 2016, personal email). If Klaus was playing his organ for the ballroom, and those hip---hop producers who sampled him were writing music for social situations too, the YSLABR rendering is instead a reflection of the personal: that quiet moment where one can listen to and enjoy all the tracks on a Klaus Wunderlich album, no matter how uncool, or pick up copy number eighteen from the local charity shop

on a rainy Thursday afternoon, for 75p, and have that small, yet important feeling of elation.

Adorno would probably struggle to find any sense of elation in owning eighteen copies of the same record, as for him repetition of objects signified the constraint and impositions of the culture industry. Repetition in music was seen as reductive and jejune, reifying the imagination rather than allowing for its progression. Dance music forms with their roots in the African musical tradition have been on the receiving end of such criticism. Demers recounts that 'Stockhausen responding to the music of Aphex Twin, Scanner and other recent electronica artists, criticizes their use of repetitive rhythms and loops as simplistic and (alarmingly) "post---African"' (Demers, 2010: 48).

Yet, as Middleton points out, this very 'dialectic... appears to grind to a teeth---gritting, unreconciled stasis' (Middleton, 1997: online). He goes on to point out that 'the moment of jouissance, is rupture, a break with the code, a transgression.' So for Middleton, 'the terms of the debate are set...with repetition at one side and shock at the other' (Middleton, 1997: online).

In YSLABR, I have attempted to make pieces that vacillate between the edges of repetition, yet fall into moments of chaos. As I outlined above, I have drawn minuscule changes into the writing of the pieces in the hope that they undulate and shiver, subtly progressing in their underlying stability. For John Cage, the introduction of chance operations into this compositional process was a way of challenging the notion of repetitious stagnation. Cage famously did this in various ways either through score or performance, and indeed made the clear distinction between chance and indeterminacy, as Grubbs clarifies: '[c]hance for him meant the composer using an indeterminate method to make something determinate' (Grubbs, 2014: 82). I would suggest that this is a fitting description of the way in which the YSLABR pieces have come about. The lapidary qualities of the vinyl record afforded me the chance to produce the palimpsest. How these vandalized records would sound, even if they would play back, was up for debate.

Finding a group of people willing to part with their treasured possessions was also a random process. And finally, the stories they told were equally beyond my control. The pieces produced cannot be said to be indeterminate, but the chance has provided the materials for the compositional process. For Cage perfection is ‘dull professionalism’, it is the ‘privileging text over sound – and perhaps through repetition, of turning sound into text’ (Grubbs, 2014: 93). Yet I find this conception pessimistic and reductive. Cage misses much of the nuance inherent in recorded music, as Grubbs argues: ‘sound recording comes to us as a means of representing the extracompositional excess that is crucial to... music... it isn’t about the tune so much as how it gets across, and what previously unimagined sounds wind up in the grooves of a record’ (Grubbs, 2014: 96---97).

There is no doubt that repetition of forms, styles, and ideas can be dangerous and has the potential to wrap music up in a straightjacket. It glorifies sameness and is vituperative to difference when placed in the wrong hands. But equally, repetition can be the engine room of change; according to Campanelli, ‘repetition is never a return to the identical... repetitions lead to changes’ (Campanelli, 2015: 77). The track ‘Dodgy’ from YSLABR finds itself at the nexus of this dialectic.

‘The song that I’ve picked is from a band from the 90s called Dodgy, and I’ve picked ‘Good Enough’, which is probably their biggest hit... I just became a massive fan of ‘em... I thought they were the real deal, and I still do’ (Derek, 2015). From being a ‘massive fan’, and via a number of chance meetings and coincidences, Derek fell into being the band’s manager, although he says, ‘Dodgy is unmanageable, they look after themselves’ (Derek, 2015). At the height of Dodgy’s success in the late 90’s, when this song ‘Good Enough’ was riding high in the pop charts, the band were offered the chance to tour America as the precursor to a deal with the major American label A&M Records. With the tour looming and pressure building on the lead singer and songwriter, Nigel, ‘he just thought well forget this and he went, he just literally disappeared, walked away, and that were it.’ As Derek goes on to say, ‘where he needs to be in control and when it becomes a bigger thing he can’t quite deal with it’ (Derek, 2015).

Derek describes 'Good Enough' as 'a simple pop gem, and they're the best. The Beatles did millions of them, and Dodgy did one, maybe?' The success that the band had after the release of 'Good Enough' was the catalyst for the lead singer's self imposed hiatus, yet Derek speaks of the song as 'where it all started, it's a symbol of life' (Derek, 2015). It does in fact seem to be the band's life blood, because as Derek recalls, 'we've got twelve UK top forties we can sing, but you leave that song out of any Dodgy set and there is hell to pay, you cannot leave it out, despite the band wanting to, to move onto pastures new, they cannot leave that song out, it's got to be in there' (Derek, 2015). Over the course of the interview that was long and wide---ranging, the impact of this one song on the life of the band, and especially its writer Nigel, appeared to be a recurring theme. It was evident that the relationship to 'Good Enough' was bittersweet. So at the time of writing 'Good Enough', Nigel is in complete control. He has crafted a piece of three---minute pop music that is memorable, easy on the ear, and proves to be immensely popular. But that popularity comes at a cost. The song seems to take on a life of its own and attains its own agency as it travels uncontrolled across the world. It was also striking when thinking about how guilty the song was of the sins of repetition as outlined above, I would suggest that Adorno wouldn't think it was good enough by any measure that could be applied. Derek enthusiastically tells me, however, that 'Good Enough' last week celebrated one million listens on Spotify, one million listens!' (Derek, 2015) This plays into a model described by Brown as he says, 'finally repetition plays its role one more time, when the rejected item is recycled as a 'golden oldie' the systems hums' (Brown, 2000: 113).

'Dodgy' attempts to reflect this uncertainty and loss of control in its form. I wanted to make something which would be unmemorable, difficult to follow, but that would also have the verse/chorus duality of most pop songs. In order to achieve this I attempted to create the track by randomizing both my choice of samples and selection of techniques as much as possible whilst writing. The first of these was obviously employed at the stage of creating the palimpsest, which

could be seen as an act of vandalism or violence against the record and the song contained within. During the playback and recording of the record, I refrained from making detailed notes as I had done with the other tracks. I wanted to work from memory as far as I could, and I also wanted to work quickly on this track as Derek had recounted that ‘he was going for the simple pop, The Carpenters, The Beatles’ ‘Here Comes the Sun’, and he wrote it in half an hour with a simplicity, and if you ask him what it means he says, ‘don’t ask me, it doesn’t mean anything.’” (Derek, 2015) So I wanted to replicate this kind of immediacy, and importantly in that decision to stick with the results.

With the other tracks, I had painstakingly chopped away the tiny fragments of sound that I felt might be useful and could make up the final pieces. In this instance, however, I took the first few seconds of the playing of the ‘Good Enough’ palimpsest, and I also took one deliberate sample of Nigel singing ‘Good Enough’ from the first chorus. Admittedly this choice broke my own rules for this particular track, but I could justify it through the rhizomatic conversations I was employing in the rest of the YSLABR. I felt it only right that we should hear from Nigel himself.

As stated above, I took one sample from the start of the track and processed this in a way that was only employed for ‘Dodgy’. I placed the sample over five tracks and stretched it out until it was classic pop song length, three and a half minutes. I then chose a different effect for each of the tracks, for example compression, reverb, chorus, echo, and delay. I had previously been using the same settings for these effects across all the rest of the tracks in order that the final pieces had an overall sonic coherence, but here I chose setting parameters without first checking what they sounded like. I also programmed some automation into the development of these effects again without checking how this would eventually sound. Usually whilst developing the sound of a fragment, there is a huge amount of repetition, playing the sound, or the phrase, over and over until it has been perfectly shaped. In this instance I had to refrain from doing this until all the elements were in place.

The track has an underlying electronic sounding rhythm, and at the one, two, and three minute mark, the 'chorus' repeats. All these sounds were gleaned from the same sample, a fragment which was again cut away randomly from another section of the track. I decided to open this sound using the in---built sampler in Logic Pro 9. I accidentally discovered that you could control the sampler via the computer's keyboard. So as the track played, I started to type D---O---D---G---Y repeatedly in time with a click track generated by the computer; as Grubbs says of Cage, he 'found the workings of chance in play of technological mediation' (Grubbs, 2014: 92). Lastly, as I scanned through the files I realized that the playing of side two of the Dodgy record, a track named 'Lovebirds On Katovit', came in at just over three minutes, so I transferred the whole file onto a new track, without any edits or effects added.

When I re---opened the project file later that evening in order to listen back to what I had, it transpired that I had not saved the files in the sampler correctly, and so the sampler was playing a default setting, which plays the synth---esque sounds that are now heard in the track, which have been produced by the keyboard strokes I made previously. Demers makes the assertion that 'popular music often compares itself with art music in order to access some of that prestige, just as art music frequently avoids comparisons with popular music lest it seem trivial or commercial' (Demers, 2010: 149). In the case of Derek and 'Dodgy', much of the dialectic tension between art and commerce, autonomy and control, production and reception is played out, and through my compositional methods I have tried to encapsulate this in the final work.

YSLABR is built on the connotative experience; it has been painted and populated with the characters of the life world, and the emotional resonances that my respondents and their records have brought with them to the project. I have used these personal materials as a platform to start the creative journey. This is intertwined with my own personal relationship to music and an acknowledgment of my own limitations working with musical material. The

interpenetration of these positions gave me an indication as to how to treat these samples, these objects. This, however, was not prefigured by a notion or personal belief that I would be able to create a literal expression of a person's deepest desires, anxieties, and joys. These concomitant dialogues provided the launching point for form, structure, timbre, rhythm, and sound.

CONCLUSION:

YOU SOUND LIKE A BROKEN RECORD

The YSLABR project hoped to open a productive dialogue between industry, user, artefact, artist, music, and society using the personal narratives of vinyl ownership as its primary influence and source material. Employing a practice based methodology involving the creation of original physical and sonic artworks, it took on the following questions: What can personal narratives associated with vinyl records provide in terms of re---thinking this icon of the music industry? Where does the vinyl record fit into the fluid and fragmentary narratives of musical listening? How does it interface with the other strands of narrative formation over the time of personal ownership, and can creative intervention help to unpack its complex ontology? In doing so the thesis interrogated the role of material props in aiding and managing personal identification through music?

These research aims have taken on additional significance since the start of this project as the sales of vinyl records have soared over the past four years, with 4.1 million albums being sold in 2017. (Helfet, 2018: online) Although it has long been felt by some that vinyl has a certain mystical quality that can account in some part for its longevity, this recent upsurge brings a new urgency to this work, with old users re---associating with the format and a new generation of music listeners attempting to find a connection in music's dwindling materiality. Although there is a limitation to the historical period of my data collection, I would argue that there is still much to be learnt from the personal stories that I collected and from the re---telling of these stories in the 'recordworks' I have produced, to better understand this new era of hybrid listening practices.

As stated in Chapter One, vinyl is a technology that bridges the gap between the living and the dead, between nature and the machine, art and the market, creativity and mechanization, performer and audience. The disc's ability to

contest near fatal takeovers by other formats has been remarkable, and speaks to a notion of resistance and an inherent humanness that underpins the whole of this work. This humanness has been gestured to by other writers in previous studies, yet in this work I used these very human stories to veer away from the canonical master narrative of the vinyl story and to see how these records have affected the everyday consumer.

To demonstrate this, I first presented a brief history of the ways in which artists in various fields have subversively manipulated the vinyl record, and analysed how these uses have left a significant legacy on the sounds and practices of contemporary music. I showed how early work with the musical disc explored the political, material, sonic, and aesthetic properties of the format, highlighting its fascinating potentials from its earliest days. Across musical, performance, and gallery spaces the record has provided a symbol of subversion from the more constraining aesthetic necessities of the market. Yet it has been equally at home in a high street supermarket, in fact exactly the place where many of my respondents found it. By discussing the work of Moholy---Nagy, Hindemith, Toch, Cage, Coltrane, Marclay, and Knizak, I traced a direct lineage to some of the paradoxes and inherent tensions involved with the production and conception of my own 'recordworks'. These paradoxes were discussed in relation to the theoretical positions of Adorno on the standardization of music due to its commodification via the phonograph disc. I argued however that the record has been used as a catalyst for radical creative practice, not just 'the acoustic photograph that the dog so happily recognizes' (Adorno, 1934: 278), and in so doing has led to a series of mainstream musical practices that would not have been possible without these forays into vinyl vandalism. Unearthing the record's productive potentials has changed the history of twentieth century music, with hip---hop being the obvious example; without the same wide impact I would argue that YSLABR contributes an original voice to this lineage of creative practice. The productive compositional uses of the record analysed in Chapter One, positioned the record at the center point of a cross---disciplinary cultural exchange. Not only did records represent a chance for sonic newness, but also provided a space for

personal, artistic and societal renaissance. For, it is within a plethora of dispersed environments that the record built its formidable cultural value, and these multidisciplinary contexts make up a huge part of its social importance. The record is a social entity with a social voice that speaks universally, not just because of what is impressed onto its surface but also as an object in its own right. The record has played a pivotal role in being able to channel, share, and articulate new positions of artistic, musical practices and social norms. In this regard the contribution I make to the field of sound studies is to show how such diverse tastes, sounds and attitudes to music have all been catered for via the record. And how as the bearer of these joys and tensions the record becomes a member of the family, as important as the song it carries.

As new uses and experimental practices with the vinyl record are continuing to develop, with contemporary work by the likes of Dunning, Kashiwagi, Wiggan and Yagi show, the productive boundaries of vinyl can and will be further extended. Such re---appropriations of the record to make more abstract works by subverting the technology have strong political overtones. For example, in my analysis of Cage's 'Imaginary Landscape No 1', in Chapter One, I made the assertion that the use of the record was complementary and expressive of huge upheavals politically, economically and ideologically, and the compositions of the time and the instrumentation they employed were reflective of this struggle. I am not, by any means, so bold as to assume that YSLABR will have anything like the impact of Cage's work, however in some small way it could be said this work has tapped into a much less existential zeitgeist. My re---articulation of the vinyl record is an important contribution to the field of sound studies, especially at a time when the record industry is working extremely hard to wrest its prize player back from the commercial darkness of independence. My creative contribution is timely and once again speaks to the paradoxical nature of this medium in a way that invites us to re---think the record as a being an everyday site for struggles over personal musical identification. A great deal of vinyl is being produced at present, to satisfy an ever---growing reissue market. Classic material is the order of the day, for example according to the Official Charts, six of the top ten biggest selling

vinyl albums of the year were reissues of classic titles from the 70s, 80s and 90's. This is a worrying trend, as many of the uses of the record which provided us with forward looking and progressive ways of seeing and hearing our world, such as punk, hip-hop, and dance music, were in the hands of young people whose attitude to these objects was experimental and irreverent. I would argue that this project originally revisits and re-invents some of these attitudes to the record and in so doing allows us re-evaluate the current identifications with, associated values and attitudes to the accouterments of musical culture.

YSLABR's personal narratives found the record to be a site of struggle and a universal signifier of a portal into new musical (and therefore social) spaces for its users. However in this function it has been usurped by the infinite Internet archive. This has changed the record into something much more exclusive, into an expensive commodity perhaps reflective a more deeply commercial society, where the subversive tactics of downloading and streaming have caused the music industry to fight back with its most potent weapon of authenticity, the vinyl record. The contribution that YSLABR has made to the field of sound studies has been to produce a minor fracture, through which the viewer or listener of this work can re-evaluate the record in its present manifestation, and furthermore to re-evaluate the music industry of which it is part. The digital realm is obsessed with the idea of personalization; it is preoccupied with self-representation, but this storytelling is expected to conform to rectangular graphical formats in a bid to brand oneself. YSLABR has engaged with this interest in the self, but has transposed it into an analogue space as a valorization of the unique relationship and bonded identity the vinyl record has provided for many of its users, making even the battered and bruised examples of vinyl as important as the Record Store Day exclusives. This mirroring of the digital in the analogue is found throughout the YSLABR work, for example the 'broken records' and the associated sonic pieces represent the fragmented listening habits of contemporary hybridized musical consumption, expressed via analogue means, a reconceptualization that marks another important contribution to the field.

As well as contributing a new and original sound world where my respondents' favorite musicians once cried out for attention, the 'broken records' have also become unique objects of the visual arts. Although I had engaged in mark-making on the records with the sole intention of producing unique sounds, I have by proxy, produced a new visual language for the record too. This opens the door to new ways of thinking about the vinyl record as a consensual triptych of, narrative device, sounding object and visual medium. The YSLABR artefacts have been exhibited a three times since I completed the whole series of works. The first exhibition took place at the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow as part of the 2016 Soundthought festival. Then they travelled to Karlsruhe in Germany and were included in the Seventh International Symposium on Music / Sonic Art at University of Music. Lastly they made up the main work at a solo show that I was asked to produce for PRISM Contemporary a small gallery in Blackburn, Lancashire. As art objects, the records are successful as they redraw the function of record and their visual interest highlights the productive dialogues that we have with them. As stated in the introduction, the separation of music from its material anchors led me to try and better understand what those anchors may actually be capable of securing and showing the records in these settings produced some interesting dialogues that highlighted the impact the research might have. During all these instances of exhibition, I was intrigued by the way in which these objects were able to bring about an often impassioned discussion about the role of the digital in music, and how streaming technologies have changed so many people's listening habits. It was also telling how the records and their stories were a powerful catalyst for people to tell of their own vinyl stories. These unique 'broken records', their stories and sounds were able to bring about the kind of discourse around our uses of the material props that help to manage or identification through music, discussion that could possibly produce further research in this area. This could include extending the scope of the YSLABR project and continuing this line of questioning with as many people and records as possible to produce a bigger data set with which to work. An extension to the project could also explore the digital realm using similar methodological techniques, of collecting personal narratives, and then working to combine them

with the digital objects of those narratives, namely an mp3 file, or maybe even a video, in order to maintain the visual element to the work. This could use Max MSP software to create palimpsestuous works, combining digital rather than analogue data. What was also telling was that those in attendance appeared to connect soundly with the personal narratives I had collected. It was this appreciation of the human stories that gave shape to a shared dialogue about the issues at stake with the contextualisation and sharing of music, when the material props of musical listening are disappeared. The concern of what else is lost from online musical cultures, appeared to be a pertinent and broadly interesting question, giving me hope that any further work in this area would sustain relevance and have continued impact. Bartmanski and Woodward state that the vinyl record ‘is redolent of past moods, brings back memories, concretizes loose associations, punctuates our biography. It is a time machine of sorts.’ (Bartmanski and Woodward, 2015, 176) In my conversations about the ‘broken records’ in the exhibition spaces I saw this ‘time machine’ functioning over and over again. The records transported the viewer to past and future times, simply, lucidly and without question. One of the original contributions that YSLABR makes is to bring a new audience to the record through its placement into new spaces and into new forms of experience; therefore making these objects evoke personal memory that was powerful enough to want to share. Had I placed the records in the gallery space without my inscriptions, I very much doubt that the same level of resonant response would have been created. I would argue that this is the power and original contribution of the creative practice, to help to unpack the ontological complexity of these objects.

Using the metaphor of the palimpsest, as introduced in Chapter Two, I was able to exorcise a hidden energy in these records, to draw them away from simply being ‘viscously circular’ as Eisenberg describes. (Eisenberg: 2005, 90) I found the life of a record to be multifaceted, reflecting and refracting their multiple realities in many directions, more like a gemstone than a slate. The analysis of the collected personal narratives showed the vinyl record to be a fragmentary constellation of productive dialogues that make up its vibrant agency. Thinking

about and re---inscribing the record as a palimpsest, allowed me to show how it interfaces with other strands of narrative formation, and where it fits into the fluid and fragmentary stories of musical listening. Sheena's story seemed to embody this idea with the greatest clarity, as she provided great specificity around the multiple voices of her 'Station to Station' record. Her story was parochial yet international, simultaneously personal and universal, familial yet equally outward looking and multi---cultural; and although it was about music it was bound within the explanatory writings of industrial significations. As I stated in Chapter Two, Sheena's story is caught between the highly personal and the paratexts of the industry, and is produced by 'several people writing together' (Barthes, 1977: 144), these memories become 'palimpsestuous'.

The beauty of the palimpsest is a gestalt complexity where each individual participant (I think here of participants also as sounds, writings, videos, and so on, not just people) is nominally sealed beneath the next user, yet the participants' voice is faintly audible through the morass of enmeshed experiential fibers that make up its ever---changing surface. My findings from this line of questioning are that the record provides a space to subvert the genius authorial figure constructed by the music industry by providing access to these forgotten musical sub plots, and thereby resurrecting the owners' subjectivity.

YSLABR actually flips the process of palimpsestual reanimation on its head. In normal circumstances memory is usually enacted through the associated practices of listening to the record, which then invokes specific reminiscences about time, place, people, situation, emotion, other music and so on. In this instance however the reminiscences, come first, obscuring the music to a greater or lesser degree, and reanimating it with new value through the story of the participant. This is a temporally dislocated and mediated echo. In the sonic pieces themselves all of the actors are echoed, and in their cavernous spaces of representation they float trying to find a signifying anchor. Before we can get close to reaching any kind of semiotic stability the voice has moved on again, yet the trace remains. As Barthes describes it, the text is 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centers of culture' (Barthes, 1977: 146). The personal

narratives I collected are evidence of the idea that it is not just the act of listening where music begins to crystalize its importance in the listeners life. This is just one strand of thousands that make up the fabric of the musical experience.

My practice has opened up a new way to use the human stories caught up in the historical strata of the vinyl record. In doing so I have exposed the relationships between the opaque, mercurial, and transpositional layers of the text. Physically cutting into the material of the object, invites us to hear the noise of constantly fracturing alternative sound worlds. YSLABRs contribution is the formation of new spaces of the record and the owners listening therefore providing an opposition to the apparent stability of these objects. This stability has obviously been question in the past but not through the application of the personal narrative in providing the source material for such interventions. By scratching the records surface I found that my artistic intervention could not only provide a new insight into the past musical worlds of my respondents, and the records themselves, but was also able to highlight something new about our present, hybrid, labyrinthine modes of listening. I began by stating that one of the aims of this work was to try to better understand what the material anchors of music may actually be capable of securing. The palimpsest has disclosed many unimagined identifications. I would also argue that this metaphor of the palimpsest, and its use through in a practice-led methodology, could be used as a continuing layer in the understanding not only of the vinyl record but also other objects of musical identification. Unpicking the layers in the object's historical strata highlights maybe some of the ways in which musical subjectivities are formed. The musical object holds great personal power and provides platforms for subversions, however the ways in which these take place is often forgotten and YSLABR adds this original perspective to studies of the vinyl record.

The durability of vinyl as a medium, its material power to maintain its message despite the trails of its life, was being played out under the point of my awl every time I started to make an inscription. As in the creation of the palimpsest, the writing of sound itself was distinctly obstinate about being removed. Each letter I

write forms a micro erasure, the progression of the writing additively erases most of the surface of the record with the inscription, yet much of the original sound remains, but has been significantly compromised, so much of what the record has to say is left untold. This shift in power between the actors across the life of a record was underscored by Sheena's story, and further gives weight to a conception of the record as an entity interwoven rather than pressed into shape. I would argue that the inscriptions mirror an agitation that record brings to the life of its owner, and unearthing this tension is another of the original ways that YSLABR advances our thinking about the vinyl record. The frictions between the actors in my work, have been stored up by the record and then stirred up by my intervention, and I would argue that this adds to the emotional impact of the work. However, there is potential for future work here, to fully draw together all the strands of the paratexts of a record's narrative into a single artwork where the visualization and sonification of the overlapping voices is more clearly expressed. Even though YSLABR begins to expose these relationships, one can see artists expressing such rhizomatic connections in new forms and perhaps with greater specificity. Even so, each research interview supported the view that the vinyl record's ontology is a vast and constantly growing rhizome of cultural activity that can only ever be apprehended in its incompleteness at any moment in time. We can approach the personal narratives associated with each record as the connecting tissues of this rhizome, that the creative practice signposts for both viewer and listener. This leads us to the conclusion that the record's plasticity is not only material but also conceptual, and operates outside of the constraints of any industrialization of the object.

My interviews highlighted the cross---pollinations that are constantly occurring the longer we keep a record in our lives. With this in mind it struck me that records are sites for developing tactics of resistance, with deeply felt consequences. As these records stay with us these resistances change and develop, their energy to effect changes peaks and wanes in its vigour. However the record is still kept as a symbol of such triumphs, as the stories of Andreas, Howard and Elizabeth highlight in Chapter Three. With every listen we replay

the environment, invoke our memories, and are experientially moved, consciously or not, and it is the record that collects all this meta---data. This data is relevant and phenomenologically vibrant, haptic and emotionally powerful. Each time we glance at the twenty records hiding at the bottom of a shelf, or pass the cupboard we are reminded of something with greater experiential quality than that of just the data stream. I would not like to say that the MP3 cannot replicate this, without first engaging in the research; however the record can be proven to have these effects, and YSLABR provides a contribution to this understanding. Every record is imbued with our social and emotional specificities, the record can never escape us. As stated in Chapter Three, de Certeau says that 'the text has a meaning only through its readers: it changes along with them' (de Certeau, 1984: 170), and Osborne makes the claim that 'because a record ages it feels as though it is alive, and it is loved because it ages as the owner does' (Osborne, 2012: 178) In YSLABR we have seen how my non---expert respondents have re---designed the record for new uses, as an artist might. They are tactically repositioning the terms of discourse that they have with the record, and in so doing they are able to use it as a means to control the world around them in their own terms. For the three respondents mentioned in Chapter Three, the record was an escape from the strictures of classical education and restrictions upon youthful joyousness, it was a scaffold to sexual experimentation, it was a connection to and beacon of racial identity, it was a door into new unimagined worlds, both musical and real, it was a rebel yell. But it was an addendum to grief, it was the symbol of heartache, it was the catalyst to family breakdown. In an original contribution to the field YSLABR has taken the record and forced it into playing back these paradoxical stories, and emotional reminiscences. YSLABR has engaged in an act of constructive vandalism, that maybe allows us to think more deeply about what anchors our emotional relationship to the music that we hear and hold dear.

Using the practice---based methodology to develop new insights into what can personal narratives associated with vinyl records can provide in terms of re---thinking this icon of the music industry, has shown that some of what is lost or at

least hidden for each respondent can be re---found by in a creative re---telling these stories. There is no content in this project without the interview, and there is no interview without the record. There is no record without the industry, no industry without consumer. There are no creative interventions without previous creative interventions, and these would not have been possible without the physical affordances that the record's materiality provides. Authors coalesce around the object and consequently one another, and are interlocutors with each other and the object itself. As the artist, I stood as the participant observer, catalyzing a conversation and facilitating its direction in being able to unpack the record's complex ontology. The practice has contributed in helping to develop a new space where these many voices can communicate their layered codependences. In doing so the record has provided a platform for instigating a new set of instruments to sound a unique commentary of the object and to harness the objects' own unique voice, that invites us to rethink it, in future work.

Being a practice---led investigation that asked how a creative intervention could help to unpack the vinyl record's complex ontology, this work had to engage with the sounding potential of these objects. The sonic works would also contribute to the original contribution of the project by unfixing the record from its culturally accepted conventions in the spirit of Moholy---Nagy, Knizak, Marclay, Grand Wizard Theodore and more. Earlier I described how the inscriptions have unveiled a series of different palimpsestuous layers to the record, the playing back of these palimpsests reinforces the now unquestionable uniqueness of each record, and multi---voiced character. The playbacks are a corruption of both the songs that were loved by my respondents, and the stories of these songs. I have shown here that the meaning of both of these communicative structures cannot be fixed; no matter how vehemently either personal associations or industrial narratives try to produce their own versions of meaning. This attempted fixing occurs around both the material objects of our listening and the sonic objects too, to ingratiate us to the market. In this regard the YSLABR work intervenes with both sides of this conversation. In addition the research bore out the idea of

corruption over time, as all respondents showed varying degrees of separation from or attachment to their records from their initial exposure to the object to the present day. However what is telling here is the fact that all of them had maintained the object, in order to have it to hand, so they could be part of the work. Indeed the beauty of this particular obstinate object means that it will continue to show its life's journey, and has the potential for further corruption with a future intervention.

These corruptions, as discussed in Chapter Four, also speak to the human---digital interface, as I hoped that much of the YSLABR work would provide some insights into this mode of listening. Even though a digital file can be perfectly and infinitely replicated, our memory of the copied data will differ from playing to playing, situation to situation. Post inscription the playback of the 'broken records' sonically clarifies this process. It is a process that is sonically mirroring the way in which musical memories can be compromised by time, consequence, spaces, places and the fragile nature of our relationships to others. The sonic works are productions that, are spacious yet insular and are teetering on the edge of chaos. For many of my respondents the records they gave me did not always provoke a singly joyous reaction. Many of the stories, many of the memories were often shrouded with melancholy, a sense of regret, misspent youth, or sadness of those lost. The difficulty of hearing these stories is therefore reflected in the playbacks of the broken records, and subsequently the final sonic pieces. The sounds produced can be unpleasant to listen to. These records are prone to skipping, missing parts, eliding certain details and then moving on to something that is more comfortable to repeat. And they do repeat and settle in, sticking in a groove, finding a rhythm, as the lexical and now structural qualities of the story make the needle hold its position. One could then argue that it is the writing that is producing that particular sound, that listening is compromised by reading, by other noises new voices constantly entering the field of significations. This could provide us some insight into the ways in which vinyl interfaces with the other strands of narrative formations. Because just as suddenly as one finds this loop, it jumps again. And so there is always something new to discover, but the object

needs to be cherished over time for these semiotic movements to occur. Something upsets the orbit, and we move into a new conversation with a new set of instruments, old lyrics trying to force their way in, competing with a morass of noise, crassly imposed from above. For some of the records this sonic power struggle between interweaving voices, the mechanics of the turntable, and the material of record itself may only last matter of seconds. Others kept on playing, finding new ways of temporarily negating the inevitable end of their tightening spiral. It is the interworking of the original sounds with the inscription that produce each example as original in its own right. These material behaviors, coupled with the indeterminacy of repeated playbacks, corresponded with the fragmentary version of the record that I had posited through the creation of the palimpsest. The contribution YSLABR has made to the field of sound studies can be seen in my attempt to replay or to highlight the lived experiences of my respondents through the compositional work. In so doing to I have shown what the personal narratives associated with the vinyl record provide in terms of rethinking the object, an approach that is further strengthened by the conceptual use of repetition as discussed in Chapter Four. The extra---musical that Grubbs agrees can be ‘unimagined sounds’, that, ‘wind up in the grooves of a record’ (Grubbs, 2014: 96---97), have given rise in YSLABR to a compositional technique that required repetition to work, and gives shape to the project’s original contribution in the form of its sonic works.

This work is based on reimagining the conventional thinking associated with the record. I have achieved this by using a sonic resource that is completely opposed to what would normally be expected, in certain paradigms of musical practice. For me sampling decisions were not based around my own personal taste per---se, or indeed choosing sounds to please a musical market. The fragments of these songs I recorded from the playback were like listening to the fragments of my respondent’s memory of the first time they listened to the record, or perhaps and more pertinently the last. When extracting samples, I was constantly considering the story I have been told to best choose the sounds that would tell this tale.

Because after all, this was the story of the record and the respondent, being told in increments by the record, the respondent, and myself as participant observer. The sonic pieces adhere to an ethical respect for the stories and my respondents. In fact it might be argued that actually the main selection process involved in YSLABR was choosing which elements of the story to try to bring to life through the sound work. According to Kittler, '[t]he trace preceding all writing, is simply a gramophone needle. Paving a way and retracing a path coincide.' (Kittler, 1986, 33) YSLABR's sonic pieces attempt to function within the fluidity of this paradox. As we keep the objects of our subjective representations, we are at once new, as we are old, and with each expression of the past, we recreate ourselves as future traces. The stories that we are able to tell about the records that we keep remain pregnant with powerful possibilities for instances of combinatory significations that YSLABR unveils.

The work of YSLABR has exposed the idea that we need to maintain the material props of musical identification, in order to preserve not just the objects themselves but instead to preserve our memories and attachments to one another. These reminiscences are fragile and flickering, and with each passing minute become ever more so. Holding onto these objects is holding onto ourselves, and those around us, who may no longer be part of our lives. In this way the YSLABR project has also engaged with the question of the virtual listening experience by exploring the historical strata of significations that make up the vinyl record, how these form changing subjectivities, and provide spaces for unimagined subversions and identifications to form over time. By providing a new signification of the music's materiality, YSLABR allows us to re---evaluate what it is to listen in the digital realm. This work adds the concept of mining the personal narrative to the field of sound studies. It is these stories that make an original contribution and foundation for future work. This might be comparing, contrasting and cataloguing these 'listenings', especially with the types of hybrid practices that are presently enacted as a new generation of listeners engages with their musical identifications in overlapping paradigms and experiences, of the material and virtual. With such complexities at work, I would argue that practice---

led explorations into the maintenances and developments of the personal narratives of musical histories are timely and important.

Maybe Cage was right about records, perhaps they are as useless as postcards. It could well be that they are reductive for the artist who sees their art as only existing in the now. But YSLABR has found the record to be rich and dynamic in both production and reproduction. It is full of fluid reassessments of its own position, and its lapidary potentials have provided many with the opportunity to fulfill a desire to remake the apparatus. Not only the artist, but, as I have shown, the owner too, has been able to take the record off the shelf, out of the store, and in that very moment of connection, reappraise its status as commodity, opening it up to the possibility of becoming a resistant material. In this way the record has provided a mirror to reflect our inner anxieties across its surface tension. Even as one of the most static of the technologies that could facilitate sonic replication and copying, many small but significant victories have been won inside the sleeves and grooves of our record collections. The format provides a different set of affordances for resistance, ones that are once again becoming prevalent in new contexts. If the music industry is the wicked witch, trapping and enslaving music, with inbuilt obsolescence and unabating newness, then YSLABR contributes an original approach to ontology, teased apart from the layers of the collaborative palimpsest of the record. This new approach reveals a fossilized rhizome, is apotropaic to such industrialized and canonical constraints. My new approach to the vinyl record could pull us out of a steaming wormhole, to reevaluate the richness of our listening world, and personal listening histories. We are resistant together.

Adorno is initially right about the standard unit, it is problematic. Yet it is the employment of non-standard personalized tactics, active usage of this standard unit, that separate each object from its mold. My original creative intervention produces the object as exclusive and in some ways as vibrant as the person or persons that imbued it with such energy. YSLABR's contribution to Sound Studies is to have brought these disparate elements together, and I would argue has shown that they are coherent, generative and ultimately meaningful, in ways

This project has given Sound Studies a new conception of the record. One that is embedded at the deepest levels into the ways in which individuals use the materials of musical production to shape their identities. YSLABR has discovered how incredibly multivalent individual listenership can be, and has found unique ways of exposing these rhizomatic connections so that we can all positively reassess our relationships to the music and its materialities that we hold dear.

YSLABR has vandalized and valorized in equal measure. It has used the notions of collaborative authorship, bricolage, the art of sample – based music in its many iterations, to extend and explore the sonic potentials of the vinyl record through the lives of its owners. The project has demonstrated that the vinyl record can carry the weight of its dialectics into unknown territories, and that no matter how fierce the attack, our imprints in this oily residue continue to play a unique role in a growing number of lives.

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